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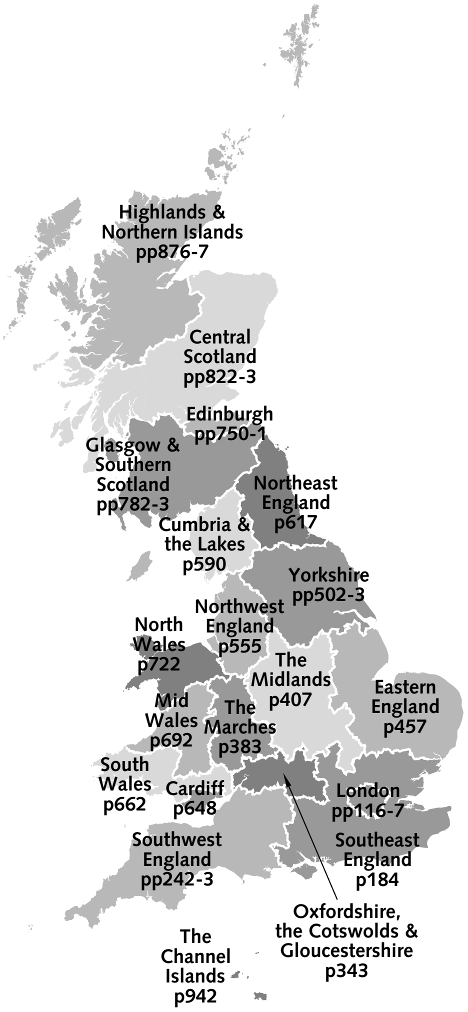
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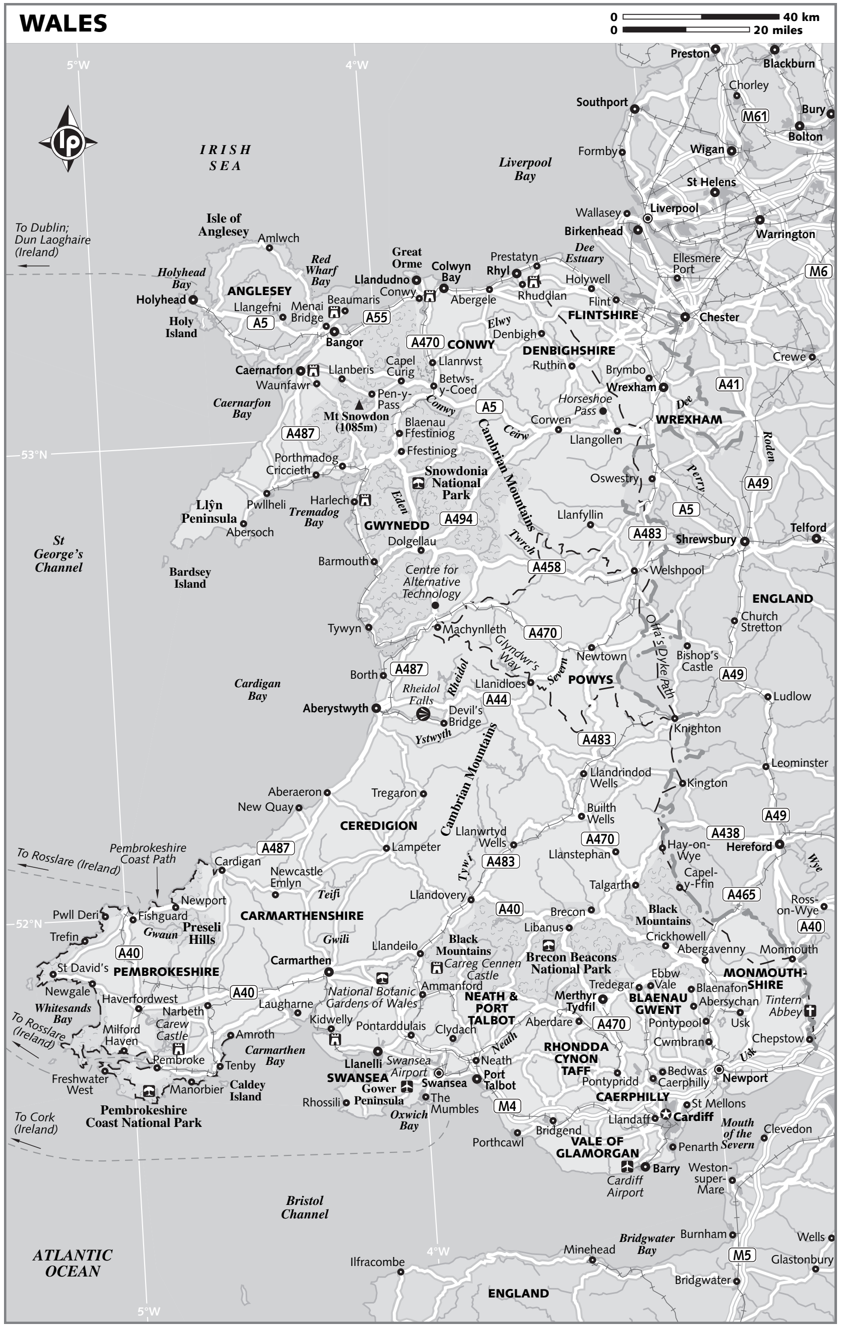
Wales

NEIL SETCHFIELD

WALES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Isle of Anglesey
ANGLESEY
Holyhead
Holy Island
Bangor
Caernarfon
Llandudno
Conwy
CONWY
Rhyl
FLINTSHIRE
DENBIGHSHIRE
Chester
Wrexham
WREXHAM
Mt Snowdon (1085m)
Snowdonia National Park
GWYNEDD
Llŷn Peninsula
Cardigan Bay
St George's Channel
Aberystwyth
Cambrian Mountains
POWYS
Shrewsbury
ENGLAND
CEREDIGION
CARMARTHENSHIRE
PEMBROKESHIRE
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Carmarthen
Swansea
SWANSEA
NEATH & PORT TALBOT
Brecon Beacons National Park
Black Mountains
MONMOUTHSHIRE
Cardiff
Newport
VALE OF GLAMORGAN
Bristol Channel
ATLANTIC OCEAN
To Dublin; Dun Laoghaire (Ireland)
To Rosslare (Ireland)
To Cork (Ireland)
Liverpool
Preston
Hereford
Offa's Dyke Path
Glyndŵr's Way

Cardiff (Caerdydd)

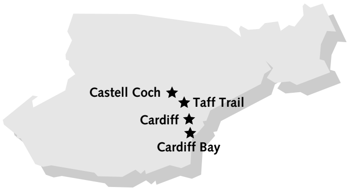
Contemporary Cardiff is the epitome of cool, pulsing with a creative energy and relaxed atmosphere that complements its youthful heritage. The capital of Wales since only 1955, the city has embraced its new role with vigour, emerging as one of Britain's leading lights in the 21st century. And it's easy to see why – historical gems, urban renovation, leafy parkland and blistering nightlife are infused with a quiet nationalistic confidence and shoehorned into a city smaller than many of its English counterparts.

Cardiff made its fortune from coal. The rich seams of the Rhondda valley propelled the Victorian town to world prominence and provided some of its greatest legacies. But the industry collapsed in the 1980s, and Cardiff hit the buffers. So step forward Cardiff Bay, a dazzling reinvention of the depressed docklands, with international restaurants, contemporary hotels and fabulous buildings of national importance such as the Wales Millennium Centre, home to the Welsh National Opera, and the Senedd, the seat of independent government. In the city centre, the elegance of the National Museum & Gallery of Wales and the City Hall stand as proud, resilient testaments to a prosperous past, while the fantastic folly of Cardiff Castle is the fairytale work of the 19th-century marquis of Bute, Cardiff's unimaginably wealthy King of Coal.

But if coal was the cake that made Cardiff fat, then sport is its modern-day icing. And perched on top, like the fattest of cherries, is the colossal Millennium Stadium, built for the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Match days paralyse the city as tens of thousands of fans pack the bars and swell the streets with a glorious, overwhelming pride – it's an experience not to be missed.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Invading the mock-Gothic folly of **Cardiff Castle** (p647), then following the leafy parkland corridor of the **Taff Trail** (p651) to magical **Castell Coch** (p659)
- Catching a gig at **Clwb Ifor Bach** (p656), the venue where some of Wales' biggest bands broke onto the scene
- Sampling the atmosphere at the jaw-dropping **Millennium Stadium** (p648)
- Getting cultural at the **National Museum & Gallery of Wales** (p647)
- Soaking up the renovated waterfront of **Cardiff Bay** (p649)
- Chilling in a contemporary **restaurant** (p654) or sipping coffee at a laid-back **café** (p655)



- TELEPHONE CODE: 029
- POPULATION: 327,706

HISTORY

You can thank the Romans for Cardiff. They built a fort here in AD 75, and the city's name is most likely derived from Caer Tâf (Taff Fort) or Caer Didi (Didius' Fort), referring to a Roman general, Aulus Didius.

Following the Norman Conquest of 1093 Robert Fitzhamon, conqueror of Glamorgan, built a castle (the remains stand in the grounds of Cardiff Castle) and a small town soon developed. Further Norman conflict followed, in 1183 and 1404, the latter inspired by Owain Glyndŵr, leader of the ill-fated rebellion against the English. Suffering severe damage during the fighting, Cardiff stagnated for centuries.

In 1801, despite being an important trading port, only 1000 people lived in the town. Not until the northern Welsh valleys kick-started the iron-making and coal-mining boom did Cardiff flourish, directed by the aristocratic Bute family of Scotland. They inherited Cardiff Castle in the 18th century, and the wealth derived from their coalfields and docks enabled them to commission further fine buildings. The castle became their resplendent family home, and in 1905 Cardiff was declared a city.

By 1913 Cardiff was the world's biggest coal port, and a colourful multiethnic community was established in dockside Butetown. Watching over it all, the third marquis of Bute had become one of the world's richest men.

WWI heralded tough times and the 1930s Depression was barely a memory before WWII ravaged Cardiff. Shortly afterwards the coal industry was nationalised, which led to the Butes packing their bags and leaving town in 1947, donating the castle and all their land to the city.

Cardiff became the Welsh capital in 1955, making it Europe's youngest capital and injecting fresh vigour to the tired city. But the coal industry was dying and, with it, the docks slipped in to decline. In 1987 a renovation project began to convert the forlorn waterfront for culture, business and leisure use. Hundreds of millions of pounds later, enter Cardiff Bay, home to a range of impressive facilities including the Senedd (Wales' independent parliament) and the stunning Wales Millennium Centre.

ORIENTATION

Central Cardiff is small enough to explore on foot. There are two unmistakable landmarks – the castle, located on the northern side, and, a little to the south, the enormous Millennium Stadium. The compact shopping and restaurant zone, including the tourist office, is located east of the stadium. The central bus and train stations are south of the centre.

Bute Park extends northwest behind the castle, bordered by the River Taff on its western side. The elegant Civic Centre, including the National Museum & Gallery of Wales, City Hall and Law Courts, is east of the park, northeast of the castle.

Cardiff Bay waterfront lies 1 mile southeast of the centre through Butetown. The leafy Cathedral Rd area, with B&Bs and guesthouses, is northwest of the castle.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Troutmark Books (☎ 2038 2814; 41-43 Castle Arcade; 🕐 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) All manner of secondhand tomes, from sci-fi to sewing and comics to classics.

TSO (Map p648; ☎ 2039 5548; 18-19 High St) Small Welsh-language section and map service.

Waterstone's (Map p648; ☎ 2066 5606; 2a The Hayes) Comprehensive travel section.

Emergency

Police station (Map p648; ☎ 2022 2111; King Edward VII Ave) Near Alexandra Gardens.

University Hospital of Wales (Map p648; ☎ 2074 7747; Heath Park) Two miles north of the Civic Centre (buses 1, 2, 8, 9 or 9A from bus station, 35 minutes), with an Accident & Emergency department.

Internet Access

Cardiff Central Library (Map p648; ☎ 2038 2116; St David's Link, Frederick St; free internet access; 🕐 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-7pm Thu, 9am-5.30pm Sat) More than 60 broadband PCs; booking recommended.

Medical Services

Pharmacies rotate late opening hours. Check the regional newspaper, *South Wales Echo*, for daily details.

Boots (Map p648; ☎ 2023 1291; 36 Queen St; 🕐 8am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 8.30am-6pm Tue & Sat, 8am-8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun)

University Hospital of Wales (Map p648; ☎ 2074 7747; Heath Park) See above.

Money

Major banks (with ATMs and currency exchange) are on Queen St, St Mary St and High St.

CARDIFF IN...

One Day

Jump-start your day in one of Cardiff's many **cafés** (p655) before invading the neo-Gothic extravagance of **Cardiff Castle** (below). Grab a quick lunch before getting some culture at the **National Museum & Gallery of Wales** (below) or sports-fever at the space-age **Millennium Stadium** (p648). In the evening stroll through **Bute Park** (below) before dinner at **Cardiff Bay** (p655) – take a **waterbus** (p651) from the city. If you're lucky, you can finish up with live music at **Clwb Ifor Bach** (p656).

Two Days

Follow the one-day itinerary, but dine in the **city centre** (p654) in the evening. On day two, head out to **Llandaff Cathedral** (p651), continuing to **Castell Coch** (p659) and **Caerphilly** (p659). For dinner, try **Cardiff Bay** (p655), before returning to town to sink a pint or two in a local **pub** (p656).

Post

Main post office (Map p648; The Hayes; 🕐 9am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue)

Tourist Information

Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre (Map p650; ☎ 2046 3833; Harbour Drive, Brittania Quay, Cardiff Bay; 🕐 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) Known as 'the tube' and shaped like a squashed aeroplane fuselage, this elevated info centre has a scale model of the bay area.

National Assembly of Wales Visitor & Education Centre (Map p650; ☎ 2089 8200; Pierhead St; admission free; 🕐 10.30am-6pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Easter)

Tourist office (Map p648; ☎ 2022 7281; www.visitcardiff.info; Old Library, The Hayes; 🕐 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Sun all year) Piles of information and an accommodation-booking service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Cardiff Castle

Dazzling Victorian style and mock-Gothic folly make **Cardiff Castle** (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8100; www.cardiffcastle.com; Castle St; adult/child grounds only £3.50/2.20, with castle tour £6.95/4.30; 🕐 9.30am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Feb) an entertaining visit. Although far from a traditional Welsh castle (it's more a collection of disparate castles around a central green), the site encompasses practically the whole history of Cardiff and is, rightly, the city's leading attraction.

To the right of the entrance the remains of a 3rd-century-AD Roman fort (that guarded the River Taff) contrast with the motte and bailey of the 12th-century Norman castle. Opposite the fort, the neo-Gothic Victorian main buildings house the reconstructed home of the coal-rich Butes.

The romantic décor which adorns their residence is a particular highlight, medieval in style following the whims of the eccentric third marquis. There's a gloriously over-the-top fireplace, a 199-mirrored bedroom ceiling, minstrels' gallery and clutch of decorative knights.

Iron and coal made the marquis' fortune and funded this fantasy. His talented designer, William Burges, executed the castle work between 1868 and 1881.

At the time of research a new visitor interpretation centre was under construction.

Bute Park & Parkland Corridor

After the urban city bustle, leafy Bute Park offers the green breathing space that all great cities need. Originally part of the castle estate, the park follows the River Taff northwest from the city, extending 7 miles upriver to Castell Coch.

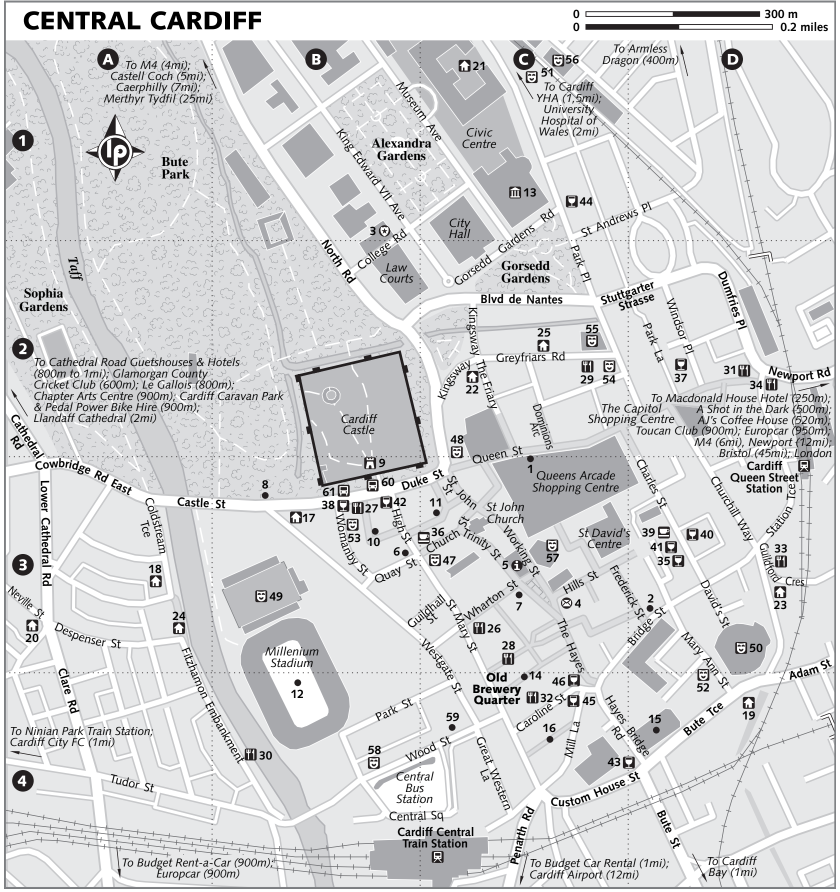
The park is bounded on Castle St, beside the castle, by an **animal wall** (Map p648), where flamboyant stone creatures squat on the parapet, perpetually immobile.

A half-mile walk leads to **Sophia Gardens** (Map p648), home to Glamorgan County Cricket Club, and busy with students from the Welsh Institute for Sport. Hire bikes from **Pedal Power Bike Hire** (☎ 07896-374679; Pontcanna Fields; per 2hr/3hr/full-day £6/8/11; 🕐 Mon, Wed & Fri-Sun), based at Cardiff Caravan Park.

National Museum & Gallery of Wales

Sitting proudly at the northern edge of the city centre is the fantastic Welsh **national museum** (Map p648; ☎ 2039 7951; www.museumwales.ac.uk; Cathays Park; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; ♿).

CENTRAL CARDIFF


0 300 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To M4 (4mi); Castell Coch (5mi); Caerphilly (7mi); Merthyr Tydfil (25mi)
To Cardiff YHA (1.5mi); University Hospital of Wales (2mi)
To Armless Dragon (400m)
Bute Park
Alexandra Gardens
Civic Centre
City Hall
Law Courts
Gorsedd Gardens
Museum Ave
King Edward VII Ave
North Rd
College Rd
Gorsedd Gardens Rd
St Andrews Pl
Park Pl
Stuttgarter Strasse
Blvd de Nantes
Windsor Pl
Dumfries Pl
Park La
Newport Rd
Taff
Sophia Gardens
To Cathedral Road Guesthouses & Hotels (800m to 1mi); Glamorgan County Cricket Club (600m); Le Gallois (800m); Chapter Arts Centre (900m); Cardiff Caravan Park & Pedal Power Bike Hire (900m); Llandaff Cathedral (2mi)
Cardiff Castle
Kingsway
The Friary
Greyfriars Rd
Dominions Arc
The Capitol Shopping Centre
To Macdonald House Hotel (250m); A Shot in the Dark (500m); AJ's Coffee House (520m); Toucan Club (900m); Europcar (950m); M4 (6mi), Newport (12mi); Bristol (45mi); London
Cardiff Queen Street Station
Queen St
Queens Arcade Shopping Centre
Charles St
Churchill Way
Station Tce
Cathedral Rd
Cowbridge Rd East
Castle St
Duke St
Lower Cathedral Rd
Coldstream Tce
High St
St John St
St John Church
Working St
St David's Centre
Womanby St
Quay St
Church St
Trinity St
Guildhall Pl
Westgate St
Wharton St
St Mary St
Hills St
The Hayes
Frederick St
Bridge St
David's St
Mary Ann St
Guildford Cres
Neville St
Despenser St
Clare Rd
Fitzhamon Embankment
Millenium Stadium
Old Brewery Quarter
Caroline St
Hayes Bridge Rd
Adam St
Bute Tce
Park St
Wood St
Great Western La
Mill La
Custom House St
Bute St
To Ninian Park Train Station; Cardiff City FC (1mi)
Tudor St
Central Bus Station
Central Sq
Cardiff Central Train Station
Penarth Rd
To Budget Rent-a-Car (900m); Europcar (900m)
To Budget Car Rental (1mi); Cardiff Airport (12mi)
To Cardiff Bay (1mi)

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TSO	6	B3
Waterstone's	7	C3
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Castle Arcade	10	B3
David Morgan Arcade	(see 10)	
High Street Arcade	11	C3
Millennium Stadium	12	B4
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Royal Arcade	14	C4
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Cardiff Bus Office	59	C4
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With international-quality galleries and enthralling natural history exhibits, this museum is a treat for adults and kids alike. Allow a day to see everything or a half-day for the highlights.

The museum is part of Cardiff's beautiful **Civic Centre** (Map p648), northeast of the castle. Built on Cardiff's coal-boom wealth, the white Portland-stone buildings also comprise the **Law Courts** and **City Hall**.

Inside, you're spoilt for choice. The national art gallery houses the largest impressionist collection outside Paris, featuring works by Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Welsh artists hold their own; Richard Wilson and Gwen and Augustus John feature prominently, and the latter's portrait of Dylan Thomas is spine-tingling.

The biggest attractions come in the galleries devoted to the natural world. Animal treats include a 9m-long humpback whale skeleton and the world's largest turtle (2.9m by 2.7m). In the mineral world, booming films of volcanic eruptions and footage of the soaring Welsh landscape trace evolution through 4600 million years.

Millennium Stadium

The scepticism that greeted the decision to build a new stadium on the grounds of the old Cardiff Arms Park disappeared with the first drop-kick at the spectacular **Millennium Stadium** (Map p648; ☎ tours 2082 2228, box office 0870 558 2582; www.millenniumstadium.co.uk; tours £5.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & Bank Holidays; ♿).

You can't miss this hulking monolith, hanging over the River Taff and dwarfing the surrounding streets. Against a tight schedule, the project was rushed through (the contractor lost a fortune) in time for the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Each of the 72,500 seats affords an unimpaired view of the action, but vertigo sufferers should avoid the precipitous upper tier.

The stadium also hosts big live-music events and football fixtures. In 2012, football fixtures for the London Olympic Games will be played here. On match days the city grinds to a halt. Streets are closed, bars are *definitely* open and the beer flows. Even if you can't get a ticket, the atmosphere is worth savouring. (For sporting events at the stadium, see p658).

A superb 45-minute tour gives a close-up look at the stadium, including access to the dressing rooms and the chance to walk down the players' tunnel. It starts at Entrance 3 on Westgate St.

Cardiff Bay

Twenty years ago Cardiff's dockland was a festering blot, Cardiff's forgotten fringe. Known as Tiger Bay, the area was forlorn and neglected, testament to Wales' long-lost industrial power.

The story of Cardiff Bay begins in the 1880s, when the burgeoning coal trade mined millions of tonnes of 'black gold' from the hills and exported it from the city docks. But demand slumped after WWII and decay followed. To cover the unsightly tidal basins, a 1.1km-long tidal barrage was constructed at the mouth of the Rivers Taff and Ely, creating a permanent 200-hectare freshwater lake and 13km-long waterfront.

THE WATERFRONT

To see the bay now it's hard to believe it was ever so decrepit. The waterfront boasts contemporary dining, world-class arts facilities,

ARCADE ADVENTURES

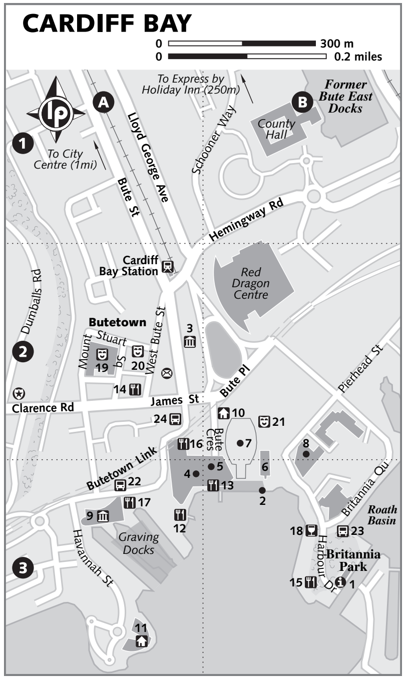
Cardiff's best shopping is hidden from view under the ornate roofs of old Victorian Arcades.

Take a wander through **Castle Arcade** (Map p648; btwn Duke St & High St), **High Street Arcade** (Map p648; btwn High St & St John St), **Royal Arcade** (Map p648; btwn St Mary St & The Hayes), **Wyndham Arcade** (Map p648; btwn Mill Lane & St Mary St) and **David Morgan Arcade** (Map p648; btwn St Mary St & The Hayes) and you'll find everything under the sun.

From retro clothes to musty tobacconists, punk gear to fresh deli meats, and cuddly toys to intimate piercings, the only restriction is the size of your wallet.

a dizzying new National Assembly building, pleasure-boat trips and Wales' premier spa hotel, St David's Hotel & Spa – on a blue-sky Sunday it's a popular place to stroll in the sun. Detractors criticise the bay for lacking atmosphere – it does feel a little staid – but the development is still young, and maturing all the time.

On the city side of the bay, **Mermaid Quay** (Map p650; www.mermaidquay.co.uk) is a dining and shopping complex. Beside it is **Roald Dahl Plass** (Map p650), an open-air boardwalk and venue during the Cardiff Festival (p652).



INFORMATION		
Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre	**1**	B3
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St David's Hotel & Spa	**11**	A3
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Bosphorus	**12**	A3
Café Naz	**13**	B3
Caribbean Restaurant	**14**	A2
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Glee Club	(see 5)	
Norwegian Church Arts Centre	(see 15)	
Point	**20**	A2
Wales Millennium Centre	**21**	B2
TRANSPORT		
Guide Friday Tourbus Stop	**22**	A3
Guide Friday Tourbus Stop	**23**	B3
Guide Friday Tourbus Stop	**24**	A2
Waterbus	(see 5)	

Cardiff Bay has enticed two distinguished organisations away from the city. The **Senedd** (Map p650; the National Assembly for Wales, see p652) resides in the impressive glass-walled, wavy-roofed building on the waterfront; next door, the red-brick **Pierhead Building** (Map p650) houses the Assembly's **Visitor & Education Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2089 8200; Pierhead St; admission free; ⏲ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Thu Easter-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Easter), explaining the devolved body's democratic function.

Bringing a Scandinavian air to the eastern tip of the bay, the little white **Norwegian Church** (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4899; Harbour Dr; admission free; ⏲ 9am-5pm) is one of the last remaining historic dockside buildings. Constructed in 1869, it was originally 200m inland but relocated by the Norwegian Seaman's Mission during redevelopment of the area. It now functions as a cute café and arts venue.

WALES MILLENNIUM CENTRE

Set back from the water, the magnificent **Wales Millennium Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk; Bute Pl) sits confidently as Wales' premier arts complex. Much more visually attractive than the Assembly, and featuring a golden roof and mauve slate panelling, the venue was designed by Welsh architect Jonathan Adam and opened in 2004 to rapturous praise. It has two theatres and is home to the Welsh National Opera.

TECHNIQUEST

Unusually for a children's attraction **Techniquest** (Map p650; ☎ 2047 5475; www.techniquest.org; Stuart St; adult/child £6.90/4.80; ⏲ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm school holidays, 10.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a place to have fun *and* learn. More than 160 hands-on demonstrations enthral kids of all ages (oldies too); fire a rocket or launch a hot-air balloon before exploring the wonderful changing exhibitions.

FREEWHEELING THROUGH WALES

All across Wales, the lush hills and gentle valleys are crisscrossed with great cycle routes. The longest is the national **Lôn Las Cymru trail**, a 311-mile epic from Cardiff to far-away Holyhead on the Isle of Anglesey.

Along the way you'll pass some achingly beautiful scenery (crossing the national parks of the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia) and visit towns including Abergavenny, Hay-on-Wye, and Machynlleth in Mid Wales, and Caernarfon in North Wales.

For serious pedal-buffs the whole route can be completed in a week, and many prefer to start out in the more populated south. Bear in mind though that the Welsh weather is rarely settled for that long, so why not ply the beautiful 40-mile **Taff Trail** to Brecon on a weekend trip, or do it vice versa for a mainly downhill ride?

You can learn more from the sustainable transport group **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.sustrans.co.uk).

BUTETOWN

Victorian **Butetown** (Map p650) was the heartbeat of Cardiff's coal trade, a multi-ethnic community that propelled the city to world fame. Today the stately streets are partly renovated (but mostly shabby) relics of the time when this was Tiger Bay, complete with gritty characters and a happening jazz scene.

The **Butetown History & Arts Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2025 7657; www.bhac.org; 5 Dock Chambers, Bute St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11am-4.30pm Sat & Sun) presents a significant, but not entirely comprehensive, photographic record of Butetown's past (plenty of 1950s family snaps), together with changing exhibitions.

The elegant **Coal Exchange** (Map p650; ☎ 2049 4917; www.coalexchange.co.uk; Mt Stuart Sq), was where the international coal price was once set. Today it's a public venue, holding a range of events (mostly bands) inside the beautiful carved-wood hall.

Close by, the **Point** (Map p650; ☎ 2046 0873; www.thepointcardiffbay.com; Mt Stuart Sq), is a Gothic-style stone church that was restored in 2003 to act as another live-music venue. Designed with acoustics in mind, the sound inside here is superb and the hall now hosts some top names.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Walk 1 mile south from the city centre down Bute St, or take bus 6 that loops between the bay and the city (20 minutes, every 10 to 15 minutes).

Shuttle trains run from Queen St station to Cardiff Bay station (four minutes, every 15 minutes).

The **Waterbus** (Map p650; ☎ 07940-142409; www.cardiffcats.com) shuttles around Mermaid Quay, the barrage and up the Taff to the city (single/return from Mermaid Quay to either barrage or city £2/4).

Llandaff Cathedral

In a peaceful suburb 2 miles northwest of the city centre, villagelike Llandaff is home to a fine-looking **cathedral** (☎ 2056 4554; www.llandaffcathedral.org.uk; Cathedral Rd; admission free).

Built on the site of a 6th-century monastery, the cathedral itself dates from 1130 and has fulfilled various roles over the centuries. Having crumbled through the Middles Ages, it found itself first an alehouse and then an animal shelter during the Reformation and Civil War. It was derelict by the 18th century, largely rebuilt during the 19th century and then heavily damaged again by German bombing during WWII. Today it is a mish-mash of styles thanks to its disturbed history; one tower dates from the 15th century, the other from the 19th.

The interior is notable for its clear glass windows; despite some stained glass (Pre-Raphaelite), the clarity of light is striking and unique. A central concrete arch carries the cathedral organ and Sir Jacob Epstein's aluminium sculpture *Christ in Majesty*. In the **St Illtyd chapel** is a triptych by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, while period artworks are scattered liberally around. The cathedral holds several daily services.

Buses 24, 25, 33 and 62 run along Cathedral Rd to Llandaff (15 to 20 minutes, every 10 to 15 minutes).

CARDIFF FOR CHILDREN

Compact and easy to navigate, Cardiff needn't be hell for families. Kids love learning, and there's nowhere better than the National Museum & Gallery of Wales (p647), full of weird and wonderful animals and fascinating exhibits. Interactive Techniquest (p650) will stretch their little brains, whilst what kid wouldn't want to stage a mock-invasion of Cardiff Castle (p647)? After that, take them on the road-train with Cardiff Bay Tours (below) or let them off the leash in pretty Bute Park (p647).

For a trip out of town, try the immense Caerphilly Castle (p659) where the open-air Museum of Welsh Life (p660) shows them an era they never knew existed.

TOURS

Bay Island Voyages (Map p650; ☎ 01445-420692; www.bayisland.co.uk) Adrenaline-filled Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) trips around the bay (£12, 30 minutes), through the barrage gates (£12, one hour) or to Flatholm and Steepholm Islands (£20, two hours).

Cardiff Bay Tours (☎ 2070 7882; www.cardiffbaytours.co.uk) Guided walking, bus, boat and road-train tours, from the bay to the city and back.

Guide Friday (☎ 2038 4291; www.guidefriday.com) Departing from the castle this hop-on hop-off open-top bus (£7.50) has 10 stops around the city, leaving every 30 to 60 minutes between 10am and 3pm (March to October only). A nonstop tour takes 50 minutes.

John May (☎ 2081 1603; 1½hr walks £5) Local historian guides you around the Civic Centre, castle grounds and riverside on a wheelchair-accessible route.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Cardiff Festival (☎ 2087 2087; www.cardiff-festival.com) This month-long festival is a summer highlight. Running from late June to early August, the knees-up features world music, the Welsh proms (classical concerts), a carnival and a popular Celtic food and drink festival.

Metro Weekender Comprises two days of live music in Bute Park in late August. Day one is Cardiff Calling (www.cardiffcalling.com), for indie bands (☎ tickets 2023 0130); while on day two South West Four (www.southwestfour.com) is all about dance acts and DJs (☎ tickets 2023 0130).

Mardi Gras Cardiff's gay-pride festival held in late August or early September; see also p657.

SLEEPING

City Centre

Keep an eye out for big sports events, when finding a bed can be impossible.

BUDGET

Cardiff Backpackers (Map p648; ☎ 2034 5577; www.cardiffbackpacker.com; 98 Neville St, Riverside; dm with light breakfast from £16; 🖳) A stalwart of the Cardiff scene, this garish purple and yellow place is a strong favourite with independent travellers. Well-maintained dorms or private rooms offer great value, and it's a mere oval ball drop-kick to the city centre.

AN INDEPENDENT FUTURE?

After several years struggling to justify its existence, the devolved National Assembly for Wales received a huge boost in July 2006 when the so-called 'Government of Wales' bill became law after opposition parties in the House of Lords, London, withdrew their objections. The decision effectively granted the Welsh people the opportunity of greater independence.

Established in 1999, the Assembly struggled amid political indifference and perceived impotence. Despite being hailed as a new dawn for Wales, only 38% of voters went to the polls in the 2003 elections. Nationalist reformers used this fact to cite the need for even greater local control, while those opposed to devolution branded the breakaway a flop.

The passing of the new bill, which will come into effect after the 2007 elections, should ignite local imagination. Shackled by London (some of the Assembly's early measures included the introduction of free milk for children), the central British government has always determined Wales' budget, taxation, foreign policy and defence strategy. For the time being that's how things will stay, but in the future it seems increasingly likely that Cardiff will be making more of the principal decisions.

Earlier in 2006, the Queen came to town to cut the ribbon on the fantastical new assembly building at Cardiff Bay, known as the **Senedd** (☎ 2082 5111; www.wales.gov.uk). Plenary (full) sessions take place here, and the centre is open to the public. Architecturally stunning, the Senedd has been championed as a 21st-century eco-building, incorporating energy-saving and recycling features. Wood chips fire the boilers and rainwater is collected to flush toilets and wash windows. Unfortunately, the project has also been beset with problems, not least of which was the leaking roof that sploshed water all around the public gallery just a week after the official opening. All the more embarrassing when the project cost £67 million, five times the original budget.

Cardiff University (University of Wales; Map p648; ☎ 2087 4702; www.cardiff.ac.uk; s £20) Pick from more than 3000 student rooms with en suite, which are available between mid-June and mid-September, many just 15 minutes' walk from the city centre.

MIDRANGE

Austin's Guest House (Map p648; ☎ 2037 7148; www.hotelcardiff.com; 11 Coldstream Tce; s/d £28/45) Shown up by the other low-cost digs near the Millennium Stadium, Austin's doesn't do anything wrong but it lacks the buzz you get elsewhere. Rooms are simple but adequate.

NosDa at the Riverbank (Map p648; ☎ 2037 8866; www.nosda.co.uk; 53-59 Despenser St; s/d from £36/52; 🖳) For backpackers demanding a little more, this vibrant place, across from the Millennium Stadium, is redefining the hostelling genre. An ex–low-class hotel, it's being renovated – cool bar, chic outdoor deck, private rooms and honest local food. At the minute, rooms were still shabby, but it's changing fast so go check it out – then let us know the latest news.

Angel (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9200; www.paramount-hotels.co.uk/angel; Castle St; s/d from £45/55; 🖳) Victorian and suitably opulent, rooms at the Angel are tastefully relaxing and good value if booked well in advance. Prices rise for short-notice bookings, so get in early for luxury at a bargain price. The grand period reception is especially impressive.

Big Sleep (Map p648; ☎ 2063 6363; www.thebigsleephotel.com; Bute Tce; d £45-99) Former office block that's harsh from the outside but funky within. 'Design B&B' isn't a term we use often, but this is it, popular with weekend clubbers and the ultracool (don't forget your jaunty beret and arty spectacles). Rooms epitomise modern cutting-edge cool, but some are bigger than others so ask for the best you can afford.

Ibis (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9250; www.ibishotel.com; Churchill Way; r from £46.95) Try this for an identikit budget chain option.

TOP END

Hilton (Map p648; ☎ 2064 6300; www.hilton.co.uk/cardiff; Kingsway; d from £112-220; P 🖳 🏊) Central Cardiff's glitziest residence has elegant rooms with all the luxuries, and rates to match. But, hey, if you want heated mirrors in your bathroom, you're gonna pay for 'em.

Other business-class places worth a splurge are the sepia-hued **Park Plaza** (Map p648; ☎ 2011 1111; www.parkplazacardiff.com; Greyfriars Rd; d £100-145; P 🖳 🏊 ♿) near the New Theatre and with good weekend deals, or the slightly less central **Macdonald House Hotel** (☎ 0870 122 0020; www.hollandhousehotel.co.uk; Newport Rd; d from £120; P 🖳 🏊), where the John Charles Presidential Suite celebrates Welsh football's greatest son.

Cardiff Bay

In keeping with the renovation, there are no budget digs by the water.

Express by Holiday Inn (☎ 2044 9000; www.hiexpress.com; Longuiel Close; r from £54.75; 🖳) These modern, slimmed down Holiday Inn places are comfortable, contemporary in style and good value for money if booked in advance. This one's in no man's land between the city and bay, but is still convenient for access to both.

our pick **Jolyons Hotel Cardiff** (Map p650; ☎ 2048 8775; www.jolyons.co.uk; Bute Crescent; d £85-140; 🚭 🖳) Overlooking Roald Dahl Plass, this former seamen's lodge offers six rooms of opulent splendour with period furniture, luxuriant furnishings, a cosy downstairs bar, and a warm welcome. Ask for special weekend rates.

St David's Hotel & Spa (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4045; www.thestdavidshotel.com; Havannah St; r from £150; 🖳 🏊) Epitomising Cardiff Bay's transformation from grimy wasteland to stylish place-to-be, this pile is popular with visiting national and international sports teams, who no doubt love its privacy and superb spa facilities.

Cathedral Road Area & Cathays

Leafy Cathedral Rd lies parallel to Bute Park, a 10- to 15-minute walk from the centre. Amid its stately Victorian town houses are some reliable old faithfuls. Cardiff YHA Hostel is in the Cathays area, 2 miles north of the centre.

BUDGET

Cardiff Caravan Park (☎ 2039 8362; Pontcanna Fields; tent sites per adult £4.25) Nestled next to the Sophia Gardens cricket ground, it's hard to believe this leafy site is just a 10-minute stroll to the city – there's plenty space but book ahead to be sure. It's also a good base for exploring the parkland corridor (p647).

Cardiff YHA (☎ 0870 770 5750; 2 Wedal Rd, Roath Park, Cathays; dm with breakfast £17.50; 🖳) Functional but drab modern building in the student district of Cathays, 2 miles north of the centre. Take bus 28, 29 or 29B from Stand D2 at the central bus station.

Welsh Institute for Sport (☎ 2030 0500; www.welsh-institute-sport.co.uk; Sophia Gardens; s/d nonmatch days £28.50/57, match days £33.50/67; ♿) Just off Cathedral Rd, this is a great option. Rooms are basic but all have bathrooms, TV and safe. Breakfast is included and other meals are available; guests can use the pool and gym for free.

MIDRANGE

Cayo Arms (☎ 2039 1910; 36 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55; 🚭) If you want B&B and a pint, why not stay in a pub? The Cayo is one of the best in town (good ale and decent food), with an easy-going vibe. When you're done supping, just totter upstairs to your unfussy and comfortable room, with bathroom.

Town House (☎ 2023 9399; www.thetownhousecardiff.co.uk; 70 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £45/62.50; 🚭 💻) Stately and imposing B&B sitting proudly on an impressive Victorian terrace. Original features such as stained glass and mosaic flooring mix with a more modern finish and restful atmosphere. Rooms are (mostly) large and well furnished.

Beaufort Guest House (☎ 2023 7003; www.beauforthousecardiff.co.uk; 65 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £49/65) In a similar vein to the Town House, this is another impressive place boasting generous rooms with bathrooms and tasteful period décor. As with all good B&Bs the breakfast should keep you firing until dinner.

Also worth trying:

Georgian Hotel (☎ 2023 2594; www.georgianhotelcardiff.co.uk; 179 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £29/48) French- and Italian-speaking staff.

Courtfield Hotel (☎ 2022 7701; www.courtfieldhotel.com; 101 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55, s without bathroom £30) Gay-run hotel (and part of the scene).

Annedd Lon (☎ 2022 3349; 157 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55) Another town-house B&B.

EATING

There's something for all among Cardiff's café-bars, international eateries and upmarket bistros.

City Centre, Cathedral Road Area & Cathays

Towards the southern end of St Mary St, opposite Wood St, an old Brains brewery has been converted into the Old Brewery Quarter, a sleek socialising hub. It's quite superficial, hosting the usual identikit names and pulling a fake-tan preclub crowd, but there are a couple of decent options in the area nonetheless.

Riverside Real Food Market (Map p648; ☎ 2019 0036; Fitzhamon Embankment; 🕑 10am-2pm Sun) For Sunday brunch alfresco wander to this weekly haven of local goodies, opposite the Millennium Stadium.

Sainsburys Central (Map p648; ☎ 2034 3748; 125-129 Queen St; 🕑 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) This supermarket is on the corner of Queen St and Dumfries Pl.

Zushi (Map p648; ☎ 2066 9911; The Aspect, 140 Queen St; plates £1.50-3.50; 🕑 noon-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Happening sushi bar (complete with conveyor belt) with different coloured plates for different priced morsels. Universally popular – young city types hang out here, kids love the moving food and spiky-haired rugby pretty-boy Gavin Henson has been snapped scoffing its delights.

Fat Cat Café Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2022 8378; Grosvenor House, Greyfriars Rd; dishes £3.95-11.95; 🕑 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) We usually steer clear of chains but this one started in Wales, and Cardiff's is the newest venture. It's slick, with comfy sofas and rich velvets, and serves from breakfast to dinner – just take your pick from a full fry-up, through to crisp salads and char-grilled steaks. Come evening, it's a hip bar.

Crumbs Salad Restaurant (Map p648; ☎ 2039 5007; 33 Morgan Arcade; dishes around £4.50; 🕑 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Wooden salad bowls are piled high with crisp leaves, fresh eggs, organic beans and tasty local cheese in this rustic little veggie-friendly place.

Muldoon's (Map p648; ☎ 2034 4949; Old Brewery Quarter; dishes around £5; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) More café than restaurant, this right-on organic place has delicious breakfasts, salads, jackets and toasties, not forgetting heavenly smoothies. Famous for having an outlet at the Saatchi & Saatchi agency in London, this is its first move out of the English capital, and it's going down well.

Celtic Cauldron (Map p648; ☎ 2038 7185; 47-49 Castle Arcade; dishes around £5-7; 🕑 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Tuck yourself away in the cosy wooden booths at this place and enjoy wholefood such as faggots (pig-offal meatballs) or a bowl of *cawl* (traditional Welsh broth).

Spice Quarter (Map p648; ☎ 2022 0075; Old Brewery Quarter; mains £6.95-11.95; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Oft-busy contemporary curry-house serving reliable Indian dishes together with more inventive regional specials such as Malabari fish curry, made with mango and coconut milk. The extensive lunchtime buffet is great value at £5.95.

Thai House (Map p648; ☎ 2038 7404; 3-5 Guildford Cres; mains £6.95-16.95; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Twenty years established and still one of the top tips for a Thai splurge, where silk-swathed waiters serve you fiery green curry or enticingly-steamed Cardigan Bay mackerel with lime, garlic and chillies. Evenings have a minimum of £17.50 per head, so if money's tight go for the lunch deals.

Café Jazz (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2161; St Mary St; 2-/3-course set menu from £7.95/10.95; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Jazz-joint by night, cool café by day, you can kick back here and enjoy anything from a coffee and cake to baked salmon or hearty lasagne. In the evening it puts on some lively gigs.

Le Gallois – Y Cymro (☎ 2034 1264; 6-10 Romilly Cres, Canton; mains £8.95-26.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Still renowned as one of Cardiff's finest, Le Gallois gives you a classy stomach-filling, allet-emptying experience. The confit of duck, with oriental greens and crispy noodles is an Eastern delight, while prime Aberdeen Angus steak comes with truffle sauce.

Armless Dragon (☎ 2038 2357; Wyeverne Rd, Cathays; lunch menu £10, 3-course dinner around £25; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) This excellent spot has been pleasing the palette with contemporary Welsh treats for more than two decades. Try prime Brecon lamb or *cawl* of seafood with spinach and saffron potatoes.

Laguna Kitchen & Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2038 8591; Park Plaza Hotel, Greyfriars Rd; mains around £15; 🕑 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Part of the sleek new Park Plaza complex, this is a contemporary restaurant, with renowned chefs, which deals in quality. Pretend you're part of the stylish crowd while enjoying pasta, oriental and traditional British dishes.

Cardiff Bay

Eddie's Diner (Map p650; ☎ 2048 4020; Mermaid Quay; mains £3.50-8.70; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Nobody does '50s diners like the Americans, but Eddie's gives it a good go. If you just want a big burger, good ol' apple pie or frothy shake then come here, make like it's *Happy Days* and pretend you're the Fonz (girls, you can pretend to be Joanie).

Caribbean Restaurant (Map p650; ☎ 2025 2102; 12 West Bute St; mains from £5.50; 🕑 5-11pm Tue-Thu, 5pm-1am Fri & Sat, 5-9.30pm Sun) One of the oldest (and best) places, this serves Jamaican treats such as rice-and-peas in a reassuringly down-to-earth setting.

Café Naz (Map p650; ☎ 2049 6555; Mermaid Quay; mains £7.95-12.95; 🕑 noon-3pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) Recommended Bangladeshi/Indian cuisine that changes with the seasons. The three-course weekday lunchtime set-meal (poppadom, naan, rice and mouth-watering curry) is superb value at £4.95, although service can be painfully slow. Good veggie options.

Norwegian Church (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4899; Harbour Dr; 🕑 9am-5pm) Divine little café in the lovely wooden church provides scrummy treats such as cakes, waffles and light lunches.

Tesco Express (Map p650; ☎ 2022 5417; Corporation Rd; 🕑 6am-11pm) This supermarket is near Mermaid Quay.

Bosphorus (Map p650; ☎ 2048 7477; Mermaid Quay; mains £8.95-14.75; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Jutting out superbly over the bay, this old favourite doesn't change much, but the views and hearty Turkish cuisine compensate for any dowdiness.

FIVE BEST CAFFEINE HITS

If your body won't pop without an espresso, cappuccino, mochaccino, americano, macchiato, café au lait, or just a good old latte, try these Cardiff cafés where you can also nibble morsels from tapas to pizza and veggie treats to decadent cakes.

AJ's Coffee House (☎ 2045 1588; 20 City Rd) Five-minute walk down Newport Rd from Queen St, then left into City Rd.

A Shot In The Dark (☎ 2047 2300; 12 City Rd) Just next door to AJ's.

Brazil Coffee Co (Map p648; ☎ 2022 4572; 4 Church St)

Café Capesso (☎ 2022 5374; 2 Mundy Pl, Cathays) Walk past the students' union towards Cathays, right at the lights, then down Mundy Pl past the Mackintosh pub.

Capsule (Map p648; ☎ 2038 2882; 48 Charles St)

Woods (Map p650; ☎ 2049 2400; Pilotage Bldg; mains £9.45-18.45; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Converted from the dockside building once occupied by the pilots who guided in ships, this classy place serves dishes as diverse as pig trotters, roasted Mediterranean veg and Thai-style mussels. Fish and chips are recommended.

Tides (Map p650; ☎ 2031 3018; St David's Hotel & Spa; 2-/3-course dinner £25/30; 🕐 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Stylishly located in Cardiff's glitziest hotel, Tides pulls a well-heeled crowd with dishes such as roast lamb-rump with garlic mash or sea bass fillet with seared parsnips, orange-flavoured spinach and saffron sauce. Recommended for a splurge – bookings essential for fixed-price menu.

DRINKING

Weekend boozing means St Mary St, when the road is closed and drinkers stagger to and fro unhindered by cars. It can be rough though, so dig a little deeper and try one of these gems.

Café Bar Europa (Map p648; ☎ 2066 7776; 25 Castle St; 🕐 to 11pm Wed-Sat) Favoured by the artistic crowd, little Europa is low-key by day (books, newspapers, board games) and a hip bar on four nights of the week.

Buffalo Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2031 0312; 11 Windsor Pl; 🕐 to 3am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; wi-fi) Cardiff's best bar and a haven from binge-drinking madness, laid-back Buffalo features retro furniture and an extensive drinks menu. Collapse onto a sofa for the classic-film club, play old-school video games, bring your MP3 for an open DJ night or enjoy tasty daytime food.

Recommended pubs:

Cayo Arms See p654

Goat Major (Map p648; ☎ 2038 3380; cnr Castle & High Sts)

Inncognito (☎ 2041 2190; Park Pl) By the Civic Centre.

Waterguard (Map p650; ☎ 2049 9034; Britannia Park, Cardiff Bay)

ENTERTAINMENT

Cardiff's monthly what's-on magazine is *Buzz*, available in bars and at the tourist office.

Cinemas

Chapter Arts Centre (☎ 2030 4400; www.chapter.org; Market Rd, Canton) Recommended art-house place with winning café-bar.

In the city centre, **Vue** (Map p648; ☎ 0871 224 0240; Millennium Plaza, Wood St) and **Cineworld** (Map p648; ☎ 0871 200 2000; Mary Ann St) are huge national-chain multiplexes showing the latest blockbusters.

Live Music

In keeping with the youthful air of the city, Cardiff's ripping music scene can count itself among Britain's best.

Clwb Ifor Bach (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2199; www.clwb.net; 11 Womanby St; admission £3-12; 🕐 to 2am Tue & Wed, to btwn 2.30am & 4am Thu-Sat) Truly an independent music great, many a regional Welsh band has broken onto the scene here since the early 1980s. Back when the club operated a strict Welsh-speaking policy, Catatonia made it big here. Today you'll get by with English but it remains the place to catch the next big thing. It's where local kids aspire to play, while the relaxed crowd soaks up the live music with an insatiable appetite.

VOICE FROM THE HEART

A Lonely Planet reader from Wales once commented that 'all Welsh people don't sing, it's only 79%'. And we're not just talking male-voice choirs here; Cardiff bristles with the best in local Welsh music, national big-name bands and international performers. So tune up your vocal chords and let's be off.

Cardiff still plays host to big-name Welsh acts including Stereophonics, Manic Street Preachers, Feeder and, one of Britain's most consistently inventive bands, Super Furry Animals. Look out as well for gigs by lesser-known but well respected acts such as supercharged rockers Bullet For My Valentine and solo singer-songwriter Christopher Rees. Pop fans can keep an eye out for Charlotte Church, the one-time chubby-cheeked 'voice of an angel' loved by grannies far and wide, now reinvented as vamplike sex bomb and more likely to be falling out of a nightclub than releasing a decent record.

The contemporary scene pulses at Clwb Ifor Bach (above), the venue famous for breaking some of the biggest acts onto the scene.

Want something more refined? Check out the dazzling Wales Millennium Centre (opposite), St David's Hall (opposite), or the beguiling Norwegian Church Arts Centre (opposite) in Cardiff Bay.

GAY & LESBIAN CARDIFF

Cardiff is home to Wales' largest and most relaxed gay and lesbian scene (see www.gaycardiff.co.uk). Partying peaks with the colourful **Mardi Gras** (www.cardiffmardigras.co.uk), held in late August or early September.

The easy-going nightlife centres on Charles St. Here you'll find **Club X** (Map p648; ☎ 2040 0876; www.club-x-cardiff.com; No 35-39; admission £2-10; 🕐 10pm-3am Wed, 9pm-4am Fri, 9pm-6am Sat, 11.30pm-4am Sun), a gay rite of passage with music from hard house to retro-cheese. Nearby is **Exit Bar** (Map p648; ☎ 2064 0102; No 48; admission free before 9.30pm, Sun-Fri £2, Sat £3; 🕐 8pm-2am Mon-Fri, 8pm-3am Sat, 8pm-1am Sun), spinning standard disco fare, while **Bar Icon** (Map p648; ☎ 2034 4300; No 60; free admission; 🕐 5-11pm Mon-Thu, 5pm-1am Fri, noon-1am Sat) is the latest must-visit lounge bar for the style-conscious. Down on Caroline St, **Lush** (Map p648; ☎ 2035 9123; No 22; free admission; 🕐 3pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 1pm-midnight Sat, 5pm-12.30am Sun) is better suited to a relaxing glass of wine.

Two traditional gay pubs are the **Golden Cross** (Map p648; ☎ 2034 3129; 283 Hayes Bridge Rd; 🕐 to 1am Wed-Sat, to 12.30am Sun), a Grade II–listed building with drag nights and strippers, and **KX** (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9891; 25 Caroline St; 🕐 to 1am Thu-Sat, to 12.30am Sun), with karaoke and cabaret on Sundays.

The city has a couple of notably gay-friendly places to stay: try the Courtfield Hotel (p654) or, should you want to tie the knot, the opulent Angel (p653) has a civil partnership licence.

Barfly (Map p648; ☎ 0870 907 0999; www.barflyclub.com; Kingsway; admission from £2; 🕐 to 2am) Swap sweat with the students in this intense basement joint that plays host to local and international indie acts. It also holds popular alternative and electronica club nights.

Toucan Club (☎ 2049 1061; www.toucanclub.co.uk; 95 Newport Rd; admission Sun-Tue free, Wed-Sat £3-5; 🕐 to 1am Tue-Sat, to 12.30am Sun) Relocated to escape the madness of St Mary St, this tiny independent venue continues to fly the flag for the city's music aficionados. Catch an eclectic mix of world grooves, soul and acoustic sessions, with DJs spinning an array of mind-bending sounds.

St David's Hall (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8444; www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk; The Hayes; admission £5.50-30) It might be a concrete blot on the outside, but for a more civilised night out take a seat and soak up the culture of a Welsh choral recital, African gospel, orchestral performance, the annual Welsh Proms, or some of the biggest international names. You can sit on any side of the stage, getting various unique vantage points.

Wales Millennium Centre (Map p650; ☎ 0870 040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk; Bute Pl; admission £5-35) Cardiff Bay's glittering focal point is home to the Welsh National Opera, but you can also see a range of local and international performers in the Donald Gordon theatre, one of the best auditoria that Britain has to offer.

Cardiff International Arena (Map p648; ☎ 2022 4488; Mary Ann St; admission £17.50-36.50) This kind of place wasn't built for live music, which doesn't really matter because the sort of gig you'll find here is the horrific boy-band rot that only teenage girls can get excited about, along with the occasional international heavyweight whose bank balance needs boosting.

Cardiff University Students Union (Map p648; ☎ 2078 1400; www.cardiffstudents.com; Park Pl; admission £9-16) Unsurprisingly, this is a staunch student hang-out, and the premier place for the latest just-making-it-cool-on-the-circuit bands and DJs. One step up the indie ladder from the Barfly.

The following venues in Cardiff Bay are absolute winners. Keep an eye out for occasional folk and jazz performances in the idyllic, intimate and totally unique **Norwegian Church Arts Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 0870 013 1812; Harbour Dr) The flawless acoustics provide a spine-tingling experience. For contemporary shows, check the listings at the **Coal Exchange** (Map p650; ☎ 2049 4917; www.coalexchange.co.uk; Mt Stuart Sq) and the **Point** (Map p650; ☎ 2046 0873; www.thepointcardiffbay.com; Mt Stuart Sq) – for both see also p651.

Nightclubs

Throw some shapes, bust some moves and dig the grooves in these trendy places.

Aqua (Map p648; ☎ 0870 350 109; 3-6 St Mary St; 🕐 to 2am Fri & Sat) Refurbished venue spinning a mix of upfront tunes in a stylish environment.

Creation (Map p648; ☎ 2037 7014; Park Pl; admission £4-15; 🕐 to 2.30am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat) Cardiff's biggest club crams in 2500 up-for-it punters who love their commercial chart and house stuff – if you can't pull in here, you might as well stay home.

Clwb Ifor Bach (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2199; www.clwb.net; 11 Womanby St; admission £3-12; 🕐 to 2am Tue & Wed, to btwn

2.30am & 4am Thu-Sat) Has an eclectic range of club nights covering everything from drum 'n' bass to folk and old-school indie to ska-punk, sometimes all in the same night. See also p656.

Theatre

Chapter Arts Centre (☎ 2030 4400; www.chapter.org; Market Rd, Canton; theatre tickets around £8) This excellent (and cool) centre has imaginative theatre, comedy and indie cinema.

New Theatre (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8889; www.newtheatrecardiff.co.uk; Park Pl; tickets £7.50-23) This splendid theatre, restored to its Edwardian grandeur, stages classic shows from musicals to pantomime.

Sherman Theatre (Map p648; ☎ 2064 6900; www.shermantheatre.co.uk; Senghennydd Rd, Cathays; tickets £10-14; 🕒 until 2am Mon-Sat, until midnight Sun) Has new drama and comedy, and occasional free recordings for BBC Radio Wales.

Glee Club (Map p650; ☎ 0870 241 5093; www.glee.co.uk; Mermaid Quay, Cardiff Bay; £8-13; 🕒 to 2am Mon-Fri, to midnight Sat) This will have you rolling in the aisles with regular stand-up.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Cardiff airport (☎ 01446-711111; www.cwlfly.com), 12 miles southwest of the centre, in Rhoose, has daily direct flights to destinations in the UK and Continental Europe with **bmibaby** (☎ 0871 224 0224; www.bmibaby.com), **KLM** (☎ 0870 507 4074; www.klmuk.co.uk) and **Thomsonfly** (☎ 0870 1900 737; www.thomsonfly.com).

Aer Arann (☎ 0800 587 23 24; www.aerarran.com) serves Ireland, while **Zoom** (☎ 0870 240 0055; www.flyzoom.com) has low fares to Canada.

Bus

All buses use the central bus station. For details of fares and timetables, contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk).

The First Shuttle bus 100 (£6, one hour, half-hourly Monday to Friday, hourly Saturday, four Sunday) travels from Cardiff to Swansea.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) coach 322 serves Birmingham (£20.50, 2½ hours, nine daily) and Bristol (£6.50, 1¼ hours, six daily), and coach 509 serves London (£19, 3¼ hours, about hourly). For airports, coach 201 serves Heathrow (return £35, three hours, about hourly), continuing to Gatwick (£38.50, 4¼ hours).

Low-cost **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com; tickets from £1) runs to London, picking up by the castle.

SPORTING SPIRIT

Nowhere does Wales' sporting dragon roar louder than Cardiff. Rugby is the national game, played to packed houses at the spine-tingling Millennium Stadium (p648). To catch an international match here is to see inside the Welsh psyche, especially when the Six Nations tournament (contested annually between Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Italy) is in full swing. The party to end all parties came in 2005 when Wales beat Ireland in Cardiff to clinch the grand slam (victory in all five matches) for the first time since 1978. The city, and the rest of Wales, went potty. It's unlikely you'll see that again for a while, so make do with watching **Cardiff Blues** (☎ tickets 2030 2030; www.cardiffblues.com; tickets £15-24) play at the Millennium Stadium's smaller sibling, Cardiff Arms Park.

But it's not all oval balls and macho scrumming. Football's alive and kicking in the capital. **Cardiff City** (☎ tickets 0845 345 1400; www.cardiffcityfc.premiumtv.co.uk; tickets £15-26) fly the flag in the English Second Division; they're considered too big for the Welsh league. The club aspires to join the megabucks big-boys of the Premiership, and with recent shrewd signings they might just have an outside chance.

For several years from 2001, Cardiff Millennium Stadium (yes, the home to Welsh rugby) also hosted the showpiece English football event, the FA Cup Final, as construction on the new Wembley stadium in London continued to falter.

Elsewhere, the refined sound of leather on willow can be heard at **Glamorgan County Cricket Club** (☎ tickets 0871 282 3400; www.glamorgancricket.com; tickets £8-15), where exciting times lie ahead. England visited Sophia Gardens for the first time in 2006, playing Pakistan in a one-day game, but the real coup will come in 2009 when Australia and England are due to go head to head in one of the Ashes test matches.

And to top it all off Cardiff's gearing up for the 2010 Ryder Cup, with the best golfers from Europe and the USA set to tee off at the Celtic Manor resort in nearby Newport.

Car & Motorcycle

To reach central Cardiff from the M4 motorway take junction 29/A48 from the east or junction 32/A470 from the west.

Car-rental companies include **Budget Rent-a-Car** (☎ 2072 7499; 281 Penarth Rd) and **Europcar** (☎ 2049 6256; rear of 289 Penarth Rd). Prices start from around £25 daily and £115 weekly, including unlimited mileage.

Train

For fare and timetable details contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Regular services include Birmingham (£30.40, 2¼ hours, at least half-hourly), London Paddington (£67, 2¼ hours, half-hourly), Manchester (£44.90, 3½ hours, hourly) and Swansea (£7.70, 50 minutes, half-hourly).

Port-side connections (with ferries to Ireland): Fishguard, change at Swansea (£15.70, 2½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday); Holyhead (£57.50, 5½ hours, every one to two hours); and Pembroke Dock, change at Swansea (£15.70, 3¼ hours, every two hours).

Cardiff is served by **Valley Lines** (☎ 2044 9944; www.arrivatrainswales.com) trains to the Llynfi, Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Rhymney Valleys, which depart from Cardiff Central and Queen St stations.

Always try and book ahead (especially for long-distance journeys) as discounts on these fairs can be as high as 80%.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bus X91 shuttles between the airport and central bus station (30 minutes, at least hourly). Regular trains run between Rhoose Cardiff Airport station (bus link to the airport) and Cardiff Central station (30 minutes, hourly). A taxi to the city centre costs about £20.

Bicycle

The Taff Trail walking/cycle route runs through Cardiff. For bike hire, see p647.

Public Transport

Pick up a free bus/train map from the tourist office or the Cardiff Bus office.

Cardiff Bus (Map p648; ☎ 2066 6444; www.cardiffbus.com; Wood St) has an office in the Travel Shop, located just opposite the central bus and train stations. Its services run all over town; present the exact change or a travel pass.

A local Day to Go pass (daily/weekly £3/13) is valid for travel on buses around Cardiff and Penarth. A regional Network Rider pass (daily/weekly £6/20) covers Cardiff, Penarth, Castell Coch and Caerphilly, and as far as Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenafon, Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow. Buy passes on the bus or at the Travel Shop.

Local train stations are Cardiff Central, Queen St, Llandaff, Ninian Park and Cardiff Bay. **Valley Lines** (☎ 2044 9944; www.arrivatrainswales.com) trains, which depart from Cardiff Central and Queen St stations, are a good way to reach Caerphilly Castle, Penarth and Rhondda Heritage Park.

Taxi

On the street, flag a black-and-white cab, or for bookings, try **Capital Cars** (☎ 2077 7777).

AROUND CARDIFF

North of Cardiff are hills and valleys that display Wales' industrial heritage, and are also home to impressive castles.

CASTELL COCH

Fairy-tales could be made at **Castell Coch** (Cadw; ☎ 2081 0101; adult/child £3.50/3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar), seductively shrouded in thick beechwoods 5 miles northwest of Cardiff.

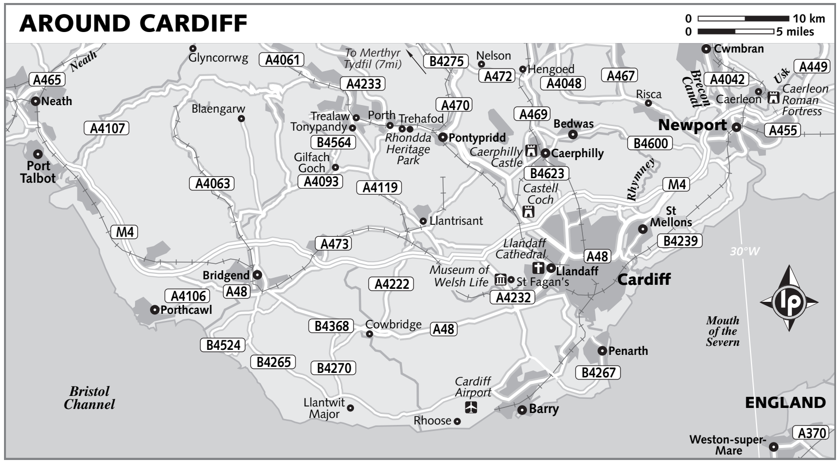
A Victorian fantasy built on the foundations of a real fortress, this was the summer retreat of Cardiff's coal-kings, the Bute family. As with glorious Cardiff Castle, the architect was William Burges, who did a fine job of creating a Disneylike hideaway. 'Kitsch' doesn't do it justice. The castle is gloriously over-the-top, featuring a tremendous drawing room decorated with mouldings from *Aesop's Fables*.

From Cardiff Central station take bus 26 (hourly Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday) to Tongwynlais, and then it's a steep 10-minute walk. Bus 26A (five daily Monday to Friday) serves Castell Coch direct.

Bus 26 continues to Caerphilly, for a two-castle day trip.

CAERPHILLY CASTLE

It would be difficult to find a more beautiful medieval fortress than 13th-century **Caerphilly Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 2088 3143; adult/child £3.50/3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep,


AROUND CARDIFF
0 10 km
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Neath
Neath
Glyncorrwg
A4061
To Merthyr Tydfil (7mi)
B4275
Nelson
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A4042
Usk
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Caerleon
Caerleon Roman Fortress
A465
A4233
A470
A469
Risca
Newport
A455
Blaengarw
Trealaw
Tonypandy
Porth
Trehafod
Rhondda Heritage Park
Pontypridd
Bedwas
A4107
B4564
Caerphilly Castle
Caerphilly
B4600
Port Talbot
Gilfach Goch
A4093
B4623
Rhymney
A4063
A4119
Castell Coch
M4
St Mellons
Llantrisant
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A473
Llandaff Cathedral
A48
B4239
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Bridgend
A4222
Museum of Welsh Life
St Fagan's
Llandaff
Cardiff
A4106
A48
A4232
Porthcawl
B4368
Cowbridge
A48
Mouth of the Severn
B4524
Penarth
B4265
B4270
B4267
Bristol Channel
Cardiff Airport
Llantwit Major
Rhoose
Barry
ENGLAND
Weston-super-Mare
A370

9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar), complete with three moats, six portcullises and five defensive doorways, not to mention a leaning tower that puts Pisa to shame (gashed open by subsidence).

Catch a Valley Lines train from Cardiff Central (20 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday). Visit both Caerphilly and Castell Coch by catching bus 26.

MUSEUM OF WELSH LIFE

Overseas visitors, kids and pensioners love the **Museum of Welsh Life** (☎ 2057 3500; St Fagan's; admission free; 🕓 10am-5pm), with a collection of 30 salvaged original buildings showing 'how life used to be'. Go to school or the wool mill before dropping into a local ironworkers' cottage from Merthyr Tydfil, the town that became the so-called 'Iron Capital of the World' in the early 18th century. The slightly twee craft displays will show you how to make clogs and barrels, among other things.

It's located at St Fagan's Castle, a 16th-century manor house 4 miles west of Cardiff. You should allow at least half a day for your visit.

From Cardiff Central station/Cathedral Rd take bus 32 (25 minutes).

RHONDDA HERITAGE PARK

You can't grasp the importance of mining in Welsh history without visiting the valleys that produced so much coal. Using ex-miners as guides, Merthyr colliery in the **Rhondda Valley** (☎ 01443-682036; www.rhonddaheritagepark.com; adult/child £5.60/4.30; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) can give you an insight into this unforgiving industry.

The park lies 10 miles northwest of Cardiff, between Pontypridd and Porth. Take a train from Cardiff Central station to Trehafod (35 minutes, half-hourly, two-hourly Sunday), or bus 132 from Cardiff Central (55 minutes, at least hourly).

CAERLEON ROMAN FORTRESS

Romans had a knack for picking strategic sites that were also habitable. For 200 years, they occupied Isca Silurium on the banks of the River Usk, later a 20-hectare township and their foremost Welsh base.

For relaxation, the 6000 soldiers visited the **amphitheatre** (open site), of which evocative mounds remain, and the **baths** (Cadw; ☎ 01633-422518; adult/child £2.90/2.50; 🕓 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). Near the baths, the **Roman Legionary Museum** (☎ 01633-423134; admission free; 🕓 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) presents an insight into Roman soldiers' lives, with finds from jewellery to children's teeth.

The fortress lies 4 miles northeast of Newport. Bus 7 runs from Newport bus station to the museum. Newport lies 12 miles east of Cardiff; take the mainline train (12 minutes, at least four hourly).

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Central Scotland

Central Scotland is less a region than a catch-all term for what comes between the Lowlands and the Highlands proper. It covers a whole gamut of terrain, from grim peaks to quiet agricultural zones, stretching across the narrow waist of the country, and including its broad eastern shoulder. The area has an enormous amount to offer with some of Scotland's most fascinating castles and stately homes, some cracking long-distance walks and cycle routes, romantic lochs and island retreats. It's also the birthplace of golf and, lest we forget, home to nearly all of Scotland's whisky distilleries.

But it's not all moody landscapes and turrets in the mist. Scotland's third- and fourth-largest cities, Aberdeen and Dundee, both have a great deal to offer, with intriguing museums, lively arts scenes and never-say-die nightlife. On the other side, however, you can trudge the hills of one-road Jura, where deer outnumber people, and feel a world away. In truth, the nature-lover is superbly catered for, with the avian paradise of Islay, the mighty Perthshire forests and the alpine landscapes around Braemar all brimming with appeal.

While there are several spots that visitors have sought for generations – Stirling's noble castle, lavish Scone Palace, romantic Loch Lomond, the sacred and magical island of Iona – there's opportunity aplenty here to explore little-known corners of Scotland. Islay enchants with its hospitality and distilleries, while Kilmartin is the cradle of modern Scotland. The valley of Glen Lyon was viewed by the ancients as a gateway to the spirit land and retains a marvellous otherworldly ambience, while the vertiginous harbour hamlet of Pennan seems to defy the sea that laps at its doorsteps.

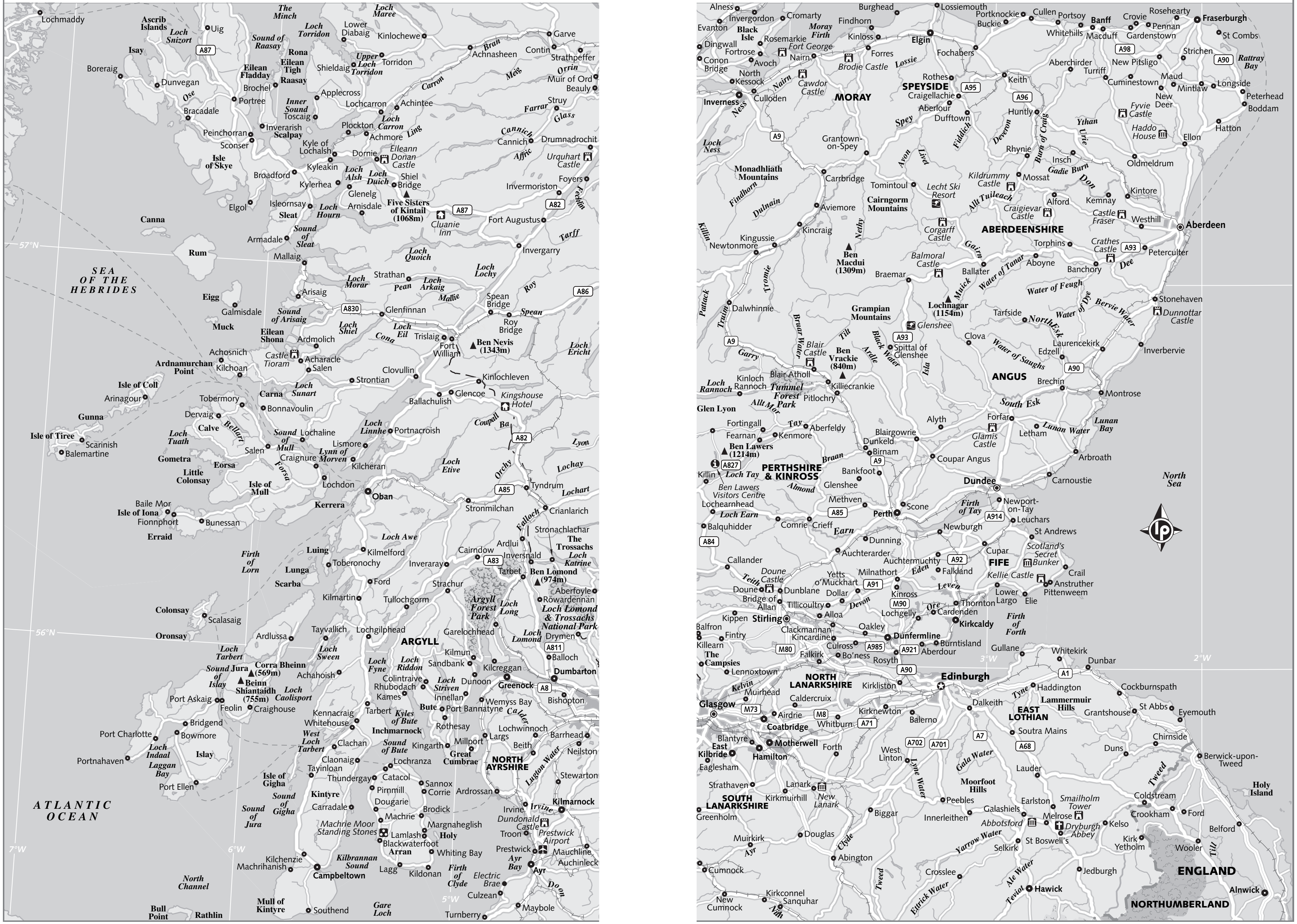
HIGHLIGHTS

- Winding your way up Perthshire's epic **Glen Lyon** (p859), gateway to a faerie land
- Exploring friendly **Islay** (p829), Scotland's whisky paradise
- Relaxing in the spiritual calm of **Iona** (p837), Scotland's holy island
- Mounting a raid on **Stirling Castle** (p839): hold it and you hold the country
- Walking the **West Highland Way** (p824) along the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond
- Strutting with the peacocks at gorgeous **Scone Palace** (p854) where once kings were crowned

Perth
Glen Lyon
Iona
Stirling
West Highland Way
Islay

- POPULATION: 1.5 MILLION
- AREA: 10,480 SQ MILES

CENTRAL SCOTLAND


0 30 km
0 20 miles
Lochmaddy
Ascrib Islands
Uig
Loch Snizort
Isay
Boreraig
Dunvegan
Ose
Bracadale
Portree
Peinchorran
Sconser
Isle of Skye
Broadford
Elgol
Canna
Rum
SEA OF THE HEBRIDES
Eigg
Galmisdale
Muck
Ardnamurchan Point
Kilchoan
Achosnich
Isle of Coll
Arinagour
Gunna
Isle of Tiree
Scarinish
Balemartine
Tobermory
Dervaig
Calve
Bellart
Loch Tuath
Gometra
Salen
Eorsa
Little Colonsay
Isle of Mull
Baile Mor
Isle of Iona
Fionnphort
Bunessan
Erraid
Firth of Lorn
Kerrera
Oban
Luing
Lunga
Scarba
Colonsay
Scalasaig
Oronsay
Ardlussa
Loch Tarbert
Jura
Sound of Islay
Corra Bheinn (569m)
Beinn Shiantaidh (755m)
Port Askaig
Feolin
Craighouse
Bridgend
Port Charlotte
Bowmore
Islay
Loch Indaal
Laggan Bay
Portnahaven
Port Ellen
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Sound of Jura
Isle of Gigha
Sound of Gigha
North Channel
Bull Point
Rathlin
Mull of Kintyre
Southend
Machrihanish
Kilchenzie
Campbeltown
Kintyre
Carradale
Kilbrannan Sound
Arran
Lamlash
Blackwaterfoot
Machrie Moor Standing Stones
Machrie
Holy
Whiting Bay
Kildonan
Lagg
Firth of Clyde
Electric Brae
Culzean
Turnberry
Maybole
Ayr
Ayr Bay
Prestwick
Prestwick Airport
Troon
Irvine
Dundonald Castle
Kilmarnock
Mauchline
Auchinleck
Doon
Stewarton
Lugton Water
NORTH AYRSHIRE
Ardrossan
Great Cumbrae
Millport
Largs
Beith
Lochwinnoch
Barrhead
Neilston
Garnock
Calder
Wemyss Bay
Greenock
Bishopton
Dumbarton
Balloch
A8
A811
Drymen
Loch Lomond
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park
Rowardennan
Aberfoyle
Ben Lomond (974m)
Tarbet
Inversnaid
The Trossachs
Loch Katrine
Stronachlachar
Ardlui
Falloch
Crianlarich
Lochart
Tyndrum
A85
Stronmilchan
Inveraray
Cairndow
A83
Argyll Forest Park
Loch Long
Garelochhead
Strachur
Kilmun
Kilcreggan
Dunoon
Sandbank
Innellan
Port Bannatyne
Rothesay
Bute
Kingarth
Sound of Bute
Inchmarnock
Kyles of Bute
Loch Striven
Loch Riddon
Colintraive
Rhubodach
Kames
Tarbert
Kennacraig
Whitehouse
West Loch Tarbert
Clachan
Claonaig
Tayinloan
Lochranza
Thundergay
Catacol
Pirnmill
Dougarie
Sannox
Corrie
Brodick
Margnaheglish
Lochgilphead
Loch Fyne
Tayvallich
Loch Sween
Achahoish
Loch Caolisport
Kilmartin
Tullochgorm
Ford
Kilmelford
Toberonochy
Loch Awe
ARGYLL
Lochdon
Kilcheran
Loch Etive
Orchy
Lochay
Lyon
Ba
A82
Coupall
Kingshouse Hotel
Glencoe
Ballachulish
Kinlochleven
Loch Leven
Ben Nevis (1343m)
Fort William
Trislaig
Loch Eil
Corpach
Clovullin
Strontian
Loch Sunart
Carna
Bonnavoulin
Sound of Mull
Lochaline
Loch Linnhe
Portnacroish
Lismore
Craignure
Lynn of Morven
Castle Tioram
Acharacle
Salen
Ardmolich
Eilean Shona
Loch Shiel
Glenfinnan
A830
Cona
Sound of Arisaig
Arisaig
Loch Morar
Mallaig
Strathan
Pean
Loch Arkaig
Mallie
Spean Bridge
Roy Bridge
Spean
Roy
A86
Loch Ericht
Loch Lochy
Invergarry
Tarff
Fort Augustus
A82
A87
Cluanie Inn
Loch Quoich
Five Sisters of Kintail (1068m)
Shiel Bridge
Loch Duich
Loch Alsh
Glenelg
Arnisdale
Loch Hourn
Sound of Sleat
Armadale
Isleornsay
Sleat
Kylerhea
Kyleakin
Kyle of Lochalsh
Dornie
Eileann Donan Castle
Plockton
Achmore
Loch Carron
Ling
Lochcarron
Achintee
Applecross
Inner Sound
Toscaig
Inverarish
Scalpay
Raasay
Eilean Tigh
Eilean Fladday
Rona
Brochel
Sound of Raasay
Shieldaig
Loch Torridon
Upper Loch Torridon
Torridon
Diabaig
Lower Diabaig
The Minch
Loch Maree
Kinlochewe
Carron
Bran
Achnasheen
Meig
Garve
Contin
Strathpeffer
Orrin
Muir of Ord
Beauly
Farrar
Struy
Glass
Cannich
Affric
Drumnadrochit
Urquhart Castle
Foyers
Feshie
Invermoriston
57°N
56°N
7°W
6°W
5°W
Alness
Invergordon
Cromarty
Evanton
Black Isle
Dingwall
Fortrose
Rosemarkie
Conon Bridge
Avoch
Fort George
Moray Firth
North Kessock
Inverness
Ness
Nairn
Culloden
Cawdor Castle
Loch Ness
A9
Burghead
Findhorn
Kinloss
Forres
Brodie Castle
Lossie
Elgin
Lossiemouth
MORAY
Fochabers
Portknockie
Buckie
Cullen
Portsoy
Whitehills
Banff
Macduff
Crovie
Gardenstown
Rosehearty
Pennan
Fraserburgh
St Combs
A98
Strichen
Rattray Bay
A90
New Pitsligo
Aberchirder
Turriff
Keith
Rothes
SPEYSIDE
A95
Craigellachie
Aberlour
Dufftown
A96
Huntly
Fiddich
Deveron
Burn of Craig
Ythan
Urie
Cuminestown
Maud
Mintlaw
Longside
Peterhead
Boddam
New Deer
Fyvie Castle
Haddo House
Hatton
Ellon
Oldmeldrum
Insch
Gadie Burn
Rhynie
Mossat
Kildrummy Castle
Don
Alford
Kemnay
Kintore
Craigievar Castle
Castle Fraser
Westhill
Aberdeen
Grantown-on-Spey
Spey
Avon
Livet
Carrbridge
Monadhliath Mountains
Findhorn
Dulnain
Aviemore
Tomintoul
Lecht Ski Resort
Cairngorm Mountains
Alt Tuileach
ABERDEENSHIRE
Corgarff Castle
Nethy
Kincraig
Kingussie
Newtonmore
Killin
Ben Macdui (1309m)
Balmoral Castle
Braemar
Gairn
Ballater
Water of Tanar
Aboyne
Torphins
Crathes Castle
A93
Banchory
Dee
Peterculter
Tromie
Truim
Pattack
Dalwhinnie
Grampian Mountains
Lochnagar (1154m)
Muick
Glenshee
Water of Feugh
Stonehaven
Dunnottar Castle
Bervie Water
Water of Dye
Tarfside
North Esk
Inverbervie
Laurencekirk
Water of Saughs
Clova
Edzell
A90
ANGUS
Brechin
Montrose
South Esk
Forfar
Glamis Castle
Lunan Water
Letham
Lunan Bay
Arbroath
Carnoustie
North Sea
A9
Garry
Bruar Water
Blair Castle
Ben Vrackie (840m)
Tilt
Ardle
Black Water
Spittal of Glenshee
Isla
Blair Atholl
Killiecrankie
Kinloch Rannoch
Loch Rannoch
Tummel Forest Park
Pitlochry
Glen Lyon
Allt Mor
Tay
Aberfeldy
Fortingall
Fearnan
Kenmore
Ben Lawers (1214m)
A827
Killin
Loch Tay
Ben Lawers Visitors Centre
PERTHSHIRE & KINROSS
Braan
Almond
Glenshee
Bankfoot
Alyth
Blairgowrie
Dunkeld
Birnam
Coupar Angus
Dundee
Newport-on-Tay
Firth of Tay
A914
Leuchars
St Andrews
Scone
Perth
Methven
A85
Lochearnhead
Loch Earn
Comrie
Crieff
Earn
Dunning
Newburgh
Balquhidder
A84
Auchterarder
Auchtermuchty
Eden
A92
Cupar
FIFE
Scotland's Secret Bunker
Crail
Anstruther
Pittenweem
Kellie Castle
Lower Largo
Elie
Leven
Falkland
Milnathort
Kinross
A91
Yetts o' Muckhart
Dollar
Devon
M90
Callander
Teith
Doune Castle
Doune
Dunblane
Bridge of Allan
Tillicoultry
Alloa
Lochgelly
Ore
Cardenden
Thornton
Kirkcaldy
Firth of Forth
Kippen
Stirling
Balfron
Fintry
Killearn
The Campsies
Clackmannan
Kincardine
Oakley
Dunfermline
Burntisland
Aberdour
A921
A985
Culross
Bo'ness
Falkirk
M80
Rosyth
A90
Gullane
Whitekirk
Dunbar
A1
3°W
2°W
Lennoxtown
Kelvin
Muirhead
NORTH LANARKSHIRE
Kirkliston
Edinburgh
Glasgow
M73
Caldercruix
Airdrie
M8
Coatbridge
Whitburn
A71
Kirknewton
Balerno
Dalkeith
Tyne
Haddington
Lammermuir Hills
EAST LOTHIAN
Cockburnspath
St Abbs
Grantshouse
Eyemouth
Blantyre
East Kilbride
Motherwell
Hamilton
Forth
West Linton
A702
A701
A7
A68
Soutra Mains
Lauder
Gala Water
Lyne Water
Eaglesham
Strathaven
Lanark
New Lanark
SOUTH LANARKSHIRE
Kirkmuirhill
Biggar
Greenholm
Peebles
Innerleithen
Moorfoot Hills
Galashiels
Earlston
Smailholm Tower
Melrose
Abbotsford
Dryburgh Abbey
St Boswell's
Selkirk
Yarrow Water
Kelso
Coldstream
Crookham
Ford
Tweed
Duns
Chirnside
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Holy Island
Belford
Wooler
Kirk Yetholm
Till
Jedburgh
ENGLAND
NORTHUMBERLAND
Alnwick
Teviot
Ale Water
Hawick
Ettrick Water
Crosslee
Tweed
Clyde
Douglas
Abington
Muirkirk
Ayr
Cumnock
New Cumnock
Kirkconnel
Sanquhar
Nith

Activities

CYCLING

Long-distance touring routes in Central Scotland include much of the 214-mile northern section of the **Lochs & Glens Cycle Way**. It starts in Glasgow, and winds its way through the region's heart via Pitlochry to Inverness, and includes some wonderful traffic-free sections (see p826).

For shorter rides, the western part of central Scotland offers the islands of Islay, Jura and Mull – all ideally explored by bike for a day or longer. If you don't have your own wheels, bikes can be hired on Mull or Islay.

A great island tour might start with a **circuit of Arran**. From here, take a ferry to the Kintyre Peninsula and loop down to Campbeltown. Then head to Islay and Jura, before returning to the mainland, reaching the port of Oban and taking another ferry to Mull. If you still have time, another ferry from Mull takes you back to the mainland at Kilchoan, from where you can reach Mallaig.

In the southeast part of this region, Fife takes cycling very seriously, and the local tourist authority has produced several maps and leaflets detailing cycle routes in this area (www.fife-cycleways.co.uk). There are only a few steep hills here, and the country roads are fairly quiet.

Another worthwhile route, **National Cycle Network Route 77**, heads out westwards from Dundee, taking in Perth and Dunkeld on the way to Pitlochry (55 miles). You get up close and personal with some fabulous Perthshire scenery.

Check out www.visitscotland.com/cycling for more details and further routes in the region.

WALKING

One of Britain's best-known long-distance walks, the **West Highland Way** (www.west-highland-way.co.uk) runs through the western part of the region. It starts just outside Glasgow and covers 95 miles of path and track through the mountains and glens, via Loch Lomond and Rannoch Moor, to finish at Fort William. It takes about a week.

The 84-mile **Speyside Way** (www.speysideway.org) is a very worthwhile and picturesque route that begins in Aviemore in the Cairngorms and heads through lush green whisky country before reaching the coast at Spey Bay and turning east to Banff. Much of the route takes you along a peaceful disused railway line well away from traffic.

One of the most challenging islands to walk is Jura, whose centre is dominated by the rugged Paps.

The central part of the region is dominated by the Grampian and Cairngorm mountain ranges. These high and wild areas tend to be favoured by serious walkers, but there are opportunities for easier strolls and rambles too. Good bases include the highland settlements of Pitlochry and Braemar.

Getting Around

BOAT

Ferries to the Hebridean islands off the west coast are mostly run by **Caledonian MacBrayne** (CalMac; ☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk). Most routes depart from Oban. If you plan to island hop, you'll save money with an Island Hopscotch ticket. A popular route leaves from Ardrossan and includes the ferry to Arran, on to the Kintyre peninsula and thence to Islay, returning to Kennacraig (or to Oban for a small additional cost). This costs £22.45 for passengers and £119 for a vehicle – a saving of over 20%.

There are also Island Rover Passes covering the whole system. Available for eight/15 consecutive days, these can be great value, costing £49.50/72 for passengers and £238/357 for vehicles. Bicycles travel free on this pass, but remember that you'll need to book your car space a few days in advance on the busier routes.

BUS

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) links the main towns in the area. Bus transport around the northeast coast is reasonable – **Stagecoach Bluebird** (☎ 01224-591381; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main operator of local services. **Postbuses** (☎ 08457-740740; www.postbus.royalmail.com) serves remote communities, charging on average £2 to £5 for single journeys.

TRAIN

There are three north–south lines, connected by a fourth running northeast from Glasgow to Aberdeen via Dundee. These include the West Highland line, Britain's most spectacular rail journey, running from Glasgow to Fort William and Mallaig. East–west travel usually involves backtracking to Glasgow.

The Central Scotland Rover pass allows unlimited travel for three days in a seven-day period on First ScotRail trains between Edinburgh and Glasgow and the Fife and Stirling areas. It costs £31 and is available from all train stations. A few conditions apply.

ARGYLL & BUTE

The ancient region of Argyll makes cartographers sweat, with its dramatically contorted coastline – fjordlike sea lochs lacerate the coast, their surfaces reflecting the weather's moods. Because of this, places such as the Mull of Kintyre, not so far from Glasgow as the crow flies, can seem impossibly remote. This same remoteness gives the islands hereabouts a timeless, special quality – locals are fond of saying that it 'takes longer to get to Jura than to Peru'.

Islay reverberates with the names of the heavyweights of the whisky world, with Ardbeg, Laphroaig, and Lagavulin among its pantheon. While exploring their peaty depths you can enjoy one of Scotland's most hospitable islands. Opposite, Jura is the remote getaway on which Orwell chose to pen *1984*.

Further north, romantically beautiful Mull is deservedly popular, and is the gateway to Iona, the magical emerald island where Macbeth, among other kings, is buried. They, along with more remote Coll and Tiree, are reached from the port of Oban. South and east of here, easily accessible from Glasgow, are the 'bonnie bonnie banks' of Loch Lomond, part of Scotland's first national park, majestic Loch Fyne, and Kilmartin Glen, which bristles with prehistoric sites.

LOCH LOMOND & TROSSACHS NATIONAL PARK

Scotland's first national park was created in 2002 with the aim of protecting two of Scotland's heaviest visited areas. The park is effectively two distinct neighbouring areas, with the Trossachs most easily accessed from Stirling and the western half centred on giant Loch Lomond, on Glasgow's northern doorstep.

Loch Lomond is a lake of two halves. The busy A82 runs along its western edge, and a huge influx of day-trippers descend on Balloch and the nearby lakeshores. The more isolated eastern shore is better territory for exploration. The road only runs as far as Rowardennan; beyond there the West Highland Way follows the shore through beautiful woodland. In general, the whole area is more sedate in spring or autumn, which are good times to visit.

The lake, Britain's largest, was formed by the action of glaciers, and lay at the junction of the three ancient Scottish kingdoms of Strathclyde, Dalriada and Pictland. Standing guard over the loch is Ben Lomond (974m) on the east coast.

Information & Orientation

The wedge-shaped loch runs 22 miles north from the town of Balloch, where you'll find the main gateway centre for the park. **Loch Lomond Shores** (☎ 01389-721500; www.lochlomond-trossachs.org; 🕒 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Oct-Mar; 💻 ♿) is a hideous Frankenstein's monster of retail, a chain aquarium, and audiovisual entertainment (a short film taking you under the waters of the lake, and a longer, romanticised account of the region's history) with a parking area the size of a small European nation. Although its purpose is highly questionable (national parks being designed to protect the countryside from this sort of crass commercialism) it has all the necessary information on the park itself.

As well as the gateway centre, there are tourist offices in **Balloch** (☎ 0870 720 0607; Balloch Rd; 🕒 Apr-Oct); **Drymen** (☎ 0870 720 0611; 🕒 May-Sep), in the library on the square; and **Tarbert** (☎ 0870 720 0623; Main St; 🕒 Apr–mid-Oct).

Activities

The national park organises a whole range of summer activities, from guided walks to archery displays. Ask for a current schedule from tourist offices.

BOAT TRIPS

The main centre for boat trips is Balloch, where, among others, **Sweeney's Cruises** (☎ 01389-752376; www.sweeney.uk.com) offers a wide range of trips from £5.50 an hour. There's a 2½-hour cruise (£8) to the village of Luss, allowing 30 minutes ashore. It also runs trips from the dock at Loch Lomond Shores.

WALKING & CYCLING

The big walk is the West Highland Way (opposite) but it's easy to access parts of the trail for shorter walks. From Rowardennan you can tackle **Ben Lomond** (974m), a popular five- to six-hour round-trip. The route begins from the car park by the Rowardennan Hotel, and you can return via Ptarmigan (731m) for good views of the loch.

A couple of fulfilling woodland walks leave from the village of Balmaha on the eastern shore of the loch. The **Millennium Forest Path** is a 40-minute introduction to the tree and plant life of the area, with gentle information on species. A longer stroll is the three-hour ascent of **Conic Hill**, which rewards with fantastic views along the loch.

The main cycle route is the **Lochs & Glens Cycle Way**, which reaches the loch at Balloch. Most of the route is set back to the east of the loch, through the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park. In summer, stick to the quieter, older roads beside the A82.

Sleeping & Eating

WESTERN SHORE

Loch Lomond SYHA (☎ 01389-850226; www.syha.org.uk; Arden; dm £15; 🕒 Mar-Oct; Ⓟ 💻) It's hard to believe this imposing mansion, sitting on a hillside 2 miles north of Balloch, is a hostel – but it is, and a great one, too. With heaps of space, loch views, good twin and family rooms, and excellent facilities, not to mention the luxury of being in a palace, it gets heavily booked up. Aficionados of the paranormal should grab one of the tower rooms as they are said to be haunted by the ghost of a young heiress who tragically fell out a window.

Drover's Inn (☎ 01301-704234; www.thedroversinn.co.uk; Inverarnan; bar meals £6-9; Ⓟ ♿) This historic inn at the northern end of the loch shouldn't be missed. Fully three centuries old, it oozes character and oddness, with kilt-wearing staff, a menagerie of stuffed animals, and a palpable sense that it hasn't changed a jot since Rob Roy dropped in for a pint. The rooms (single/double £30/58) are in the same vein (faded but characterful); on the other hand, modern en-suite rooms are available across the road, some with Jacuzzis (£90 to £110).

EASTERN SHORE

our pick **Rowardennan SYHA** (☎ 01360-870259; www.syha.org.uk; Rowardennan; dm £13.50; 🕒 Mar-Oct; Ⓟ 💻 ♿) At the end of the road on the east side of the loch, this super hostel is an elegant ex–hunting lodge right by the lake. It's a cracking place to stay, whether as a base for climbing Ben Lomond, a stop on the West Highland Way or a relaxing retreat. It's a remarkably friendly place with a great vibe and top facilities, including a kitchen and a huge lounge with windows overlooking Loch Lomond.

Inversnaid Bunkhouse (☎ 702970; www.inversnaid.com; Inversnaid; dm £16, 🕒 Mar-Oct; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi) This remote hostel is an appealing spot in a converted church, a quarter of a mile from the lake. It's on the West Highland Way but can only be accessed by road via Aberfoyle in the Trossachs. It's a relaxing place perfect for weary walkers; for sore feet, you can't beat a Jacuzzi and fine selection of real ale.

Oak Tree Inn (☎ 01360-870357; www.oak-tree-inn.co.uk; Balmaha; s/d £50/70; Ⓟ) This is a top spot in quiet Balmaha, and a haven for walkers, travellers and locals alike. It has eight good rooms as well as a cheaper bunkroom (£25 per person). Downstairs is a convivial pub, plenty of outdoor tables, and good food (from noon to 9pm), which ranges from pizzas to various incarnations of char, a local whitefish.

Getting There & Away

Citylink buses link Glasgow with Balloch (40 minutes, nine daily) and continue up the west coast to Luss and Tarbert; some bus services continue to Ardlui (1¼ hours). Buses run eight to 10 times daily from Balloch Station via Drymen to Balmaha (30 minutes).

There are two railway lines. From Glasgow, one serves Balloch (35 minutes, half-hourly); the other is the West Highland Line to Oban and Fort William (two to five daily), which follows the loch from Tarbert to Ardlui (£8.80).

INVERARAY

☎ 01499 / pop 510

Little Inveraray enjoys a privileged location on the shores of Loch Fyne, and its pretty whitewashed buildings, almost blindingly bright on a sunny day, ensure that it's well established on the coach-tour circuit. It can be somewhat overrun during the day in summer, but remains a peaceful spot off-season, and has several entertaining attractions.

Inveraray is a fine example of a planned town, built by the Duke of Argyll when he revamped his castle in the 18th century. The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0616; Front St; 🕒 daily) is beside the spectacularly beautiful loch.

Sights

INVERARAY CASTLE

Half a mile north of the town, **Inveraray Castle** (☎ 302203; www.inveraray-castle.com; admission £5.95; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2pm-5.45pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 1-5.45pm Sun Apr-May & Oct, 10am-5.45pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.45pm Sun Jun-Sep) has been the seat of the chiefs of Clan Campbell, the dukes of Argyll, since the 15th century. The current 18th-century building includes whimsical turrets and fake battlements. Inside is the armoury hall, whose walls are patterned with more than 1000 pole arms, dirks and Lochaber axes, many of which were stuck into Catholics during the Jacobite rebellions. The dining and drawing rooms have ornate ceilings and there's a collection of porcelain. Last admissions at 5pm.

INVERARAY JAIL

The Georgian courthouse and **jail** (☎ 302381; Church Sq; adult/child £6.25/3.15; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is an award-winning, interactive tourist attraction. You can sit in on a trial, try out a cell and discover the harsh torture meted out to unfortunate souls in the 16th and 17th centuries, or leaern about the many who were transported to Australia in the 19th century for minor crimes such as stealing a loaf of bread. It's a good one for the family. Last admissions one hour before closing.

Sleeping & Eating

Inveraray SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1125; www.syha.org.uk; Dalmally Rd; dm £12; 🕒 7-10.30am & 5-11.30pm Apr-Sep; Ⓟ 💻) Located in a cosy modern bungalow 200m from the lochside, up the road to Dalmally, this is a handy spot with a kitchen and lounge. Accommodation is mostly in decent four-berth bunk dormitories (there are some two-berth rooms); at time of writing access was permitted in the middle of the day, but check that that is still the case.

George Hotel (☎ 302111; www.thegeorgehotel.co.uk; Main St East; s/d £35/70, superior d £85-135; Ⓟ) The renovation of the rooms in this stately old hotel is impressive indeed; they are all different and boast a wealth of period furniture, quirky Scottish features, and comfortable beds, some in the four-poster class. It's all pretty good value, and there's a characterful pub and restaurant downstairs.

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar (☎ 600236; Cairndow; mains £8-15, 12 oysters £11.50; 🕒 9am-7.30pm Nov-Easter, 9am-8pm Easter-Oct; ♿) Although now encompassing a couple of dozen restaurants throughout the UK, this is the original, 6 miles north of Inveraray on the A83. It hit the headlines in 2004 as MPs Gordon Brown and John Prescott planned intrigues here; they knew what they were doing, as the seafood is of the highest quality – unpretentious, and good value, with sublime smoked salmon and oysters in particular. In the same building is an excellent seafood shop and deli.

Getting There & Away

From Glasgow, Citylink buses travel to Inveraray (£8, 1¾ hours, five to six daily), some continuing to Tarbert and Campbeltown. There are also buses between Inveraray and Oban (£6.70, one hour, two to three daily).

KILMARTIN GLEN

☎ 01546 / pop 490

This magical glen is a comparatively little-known highlight of Scotland. It's the heart of one of Scotland's most concentrated areas of prehistoric sites. Burial cairns, stone circles and hill forts litter the countryside. Irish invaders founded Dalriada and formed the kingdom of Alba here, which eventually united a large part of Scotland.

The **Museum of Ancient Culture** (☎ 510278; www.kilmartin.org; Kilmartin; adult/child £4.60/1.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mar–mid-Dec; ♿) is a fascinating centre

SCOTLAND'S BIRTHPLACE

The oldest monuments in Kilmartin Glen date from around 5000 years ago and comprise a linear cemetery of **burial cairns**, running south of Kilmartin village for 1.5 miles. There are also two stone circles at **Temple Wood**, three-quarters of a mile southwest of Kilmartin. Although not much remains now, the stones are in a surreal setting surrounded by farmland. Four miles north of Lochgilphead, at **Achnabreck**, elaborate cup-and-ring designs cut into rock faces resemble ripples caused by a pebble breaking the surface of a pond. The site has been described as 'one of the most extensive early rock carvings in Britain' and has outstanding views over Loch Fyne.

The hill fort of **Dunadd**, 4 miles north of Lochgilphead, was the royal residence of the first kings of Dalriada, and was probably where the Stone of Destiny, used in the investiture ceremony, was located. The faint rock carvings – an ogham inscription (ancient script), a wild boar and a footprint – were probably used in some kind of inauguration ceremony. The fort overlooks farmland and the boggy plain that is now the **Moine Mhor Nature Reserve**. Clamber to the top of the fort and you'll gaze upon the same countryside as the ancient kings did thousands of years ago. Be careful when it's wet – it gets slippery.

for archaeology and landscape interpretation, with artefacts from the sites, reconstructions, interactive displays and guided tours. There's an excellent selection of information, books and souvenirs in the shop, too, and a fine café-restaurant. It's one of Scotland's best museums, and there's always something new and interesting going on, whether it be talks, guided walks, or something aimed at the kids. Don't miss the toilets, complete with darting swallows! In Kilmartin **churchyard** beside the museum there are some 10th-century Celtic crosses.

In Kilmartin itself, there's a hotel-pub and a couple of B&Bs. There are many more accommodation choices in the surrounding villages too; the museum can locate them for you on a map. See also the boxed text, p833. **Burndale** (☎ 510 235; alan-hawkins@burndale-kilmartin.freeserve.co.uk; Kilmartin; s/d £30/52; 🅿) is a pleasant B&B with a garden in Kilmartin village. It's run by a cheery soul and is on the north side of town on the main road. By far the best place to eat is the **Glebe Cairn Café & Restaurant** (☎ 510 278; Kilmartin Museum; soup & sandwich £4.95, mains £9-12; 🕒 10am-5pm daily, 7-9pm Thu-Sat) which serves up wholesome café fare during the day and classy, good-value main meals for dinner (book ahead), served in an enchanting wooden conservatory with views over the ancient cairn below.

Getting There & Away

West Coast Motors (☎ 01586-552319) run buses every couple of hours between Lochgilphead (15 minutes) and Oban (one hour 15 minutes), stopping in Kilmartin. In Lochgilphead, you can connect with Citylink services to Inveraray and Glasgow.

KINTYRE PENINSULA

Almost an island, the Kintyre Peninsula has only a narrow strand connecting it to the wooded hills of Knapdale at Tarbert. Magnus Barefoot the Viking, who was allowed to claim any island he circumnavigated, made his men drag their longship across this strand to validate his claim.

Tarbert

Tarbert, in the peninsula's north, is the gateway to Kintyre and a pretty fishing village with colourful buildings strung along the harbour. The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0624; Harbour St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct) has internet access (per hour £3). Above the town is a small, crumbling **castle** built by Robert the Bruce.

Tarbert makes a good stop for a night. On the waterfront, the **Anchor Hotel** (☎ 01880-820 577; www.lochfyne-scotland.co.uk; Harbour St; s/d £35/50) has colourful, quirkily decorated rooms and large, attractive beds. There's good food here, but you might also head around the harbour to the friendly, bright-yellow **Victoria Hotel** (Barmore Rd; mains £8-17; 🕒 food noon-3pm & 6-9pm), which has generous portions served in an attractive conservatory dining area looking out over the water.

South of Tarbert are two CalMac ferry terminals: **Kennacraig** for Port Askaig and Port Ellen (per person/car return £13.80/73, two hours) on Islay; and **Claonaig** for Lochranza (per person/car return £7.70/35, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily late March to late October) on the north of Arran.

Isle of Gigha

From Tayinloan on the west coast there are ferries (per person/car return £5.40/20.25, 20 minutes, six to 10 daily on the hour) to the **Isle of Gigha** (www.isle-of-gigha.co.uk), pronounced *ghee*-a, a flat island 7 miles long by about 1 mile wide. Recently bought from its original owner by the residents themselves, it's known for its sandy beaches and the subtropical **Achamore Gardens** (recommended donation £2; 🕒 dawn-dusk). The **Gigha Hotel** (☎ 01583-505254; s/d £47.50/79; 🅿) has a good restaurant and lively bar.

Campbeltown

☎ 01586 / pop 5150

The journey down to Campbeltown contrasts rolling green farmland with surf-pounded beaches. The weather can change by the minute, and you feel right on the ramparts of mainland Britain. Campbeltown was in its prime in the late 19th century, but is impressively situated around a small loch surrounded by hills. The **tourist office** (☎ 552056; McKinnon House, The Pier; 🕒 daily Easter-Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) is a friendly place where you'll probably get to hear some town gossip. There were once dozens of whisky distilleries here – and the Campbeltown style is distinct – but now there are just three. You can visit **Springbank** (☎ 552085; Longrow; admission £4; 🕒 2pm by arrangement Mon-Fri), which, despite being a small-scale, personal operation, does its own malting and bottling. Famous former Kintyre residents include Paul and Linda McCartney; Linda has been commemorated with a small memorial garden, entered through the **library-museum** (☎ 552367; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat), which also has several free internet terminals. Beyond Campbeltown, a narrow, winding road leads to the **Mull of Kintyre**, popularised by McCartney's song of the same name – and the mist does indeed roll in.

Mull of Kintyre Seatours (☎ 0870 720 0609; www.mull-of-kintyre.co.uk) runs wildlife-spotting trips from Campbeltown and can also transport you across to Ayr or nearby Northern Ireland.

Campbeltown is linked by Citylink buses to Glasgow (£13.80, four hours, three daily).

ISLE OF ISLAY

☎ 01496 / pop 3460 / elev 76m

An enchantingly friendly place, Islay is the proud home of several of the world's best whiskies and is the best place in Scotland to learn about the drink and visit distilleries. If that doesn't tempt you, then the birdlife, fine seafood, clear water, and basking seals might. Although not as scenic as the more visited islands, Islay (*eye*-lah) is one of the most appealing destinations on the west coast; life here revolves around the distilleries, of which there are currently eight active. Many of them are legendary for their peatiness and their names reverberate on the tongue like a pantheon of Celtic deities. There's a notably different atmosphere on this island, a cheerier feel that locals attribute to the lowish rainfall but perhaps has more to do with malt. A wave or cheerio to passers-by is mandatory here and another small delight. You're much better visiting the island during the week, as most of the distilleries shut at weekends.

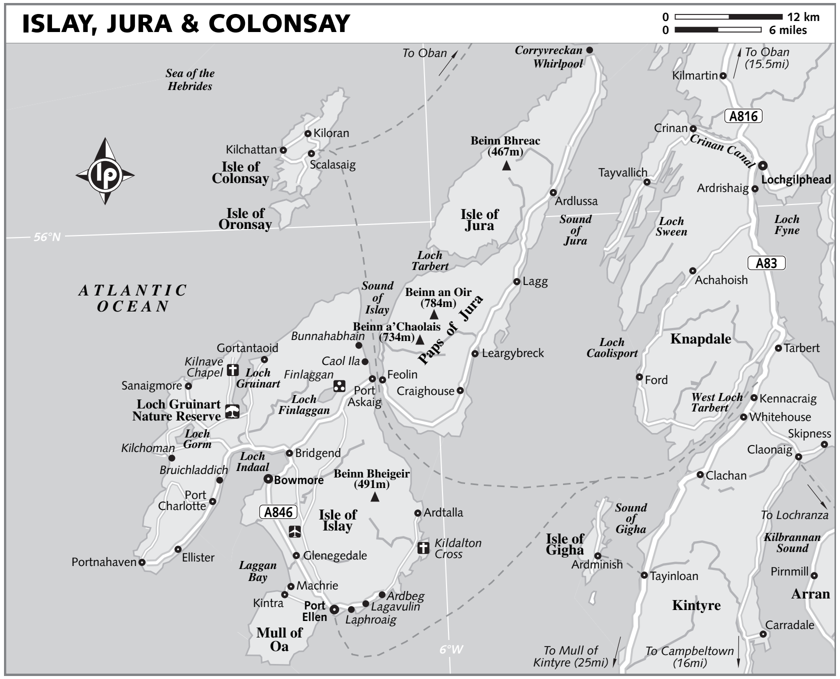
Orientation

There are two ferry terminals, both served from Kennacraig on Kintyre. Port Askaig stares across at mountainous Jura from the east of Islay, while in the south is the larger Port Ellen, with three distilleries nearby. Across Loch Indaal is the attractive village of Port Charlotte. The capital, Bowmore, is in the centre of the island.

Information

Ileach (☎ 810355; Main St, Bowmore; per hr £3; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) Internet access at the office of the island's newspaper.

McTaggart Community CyberCafe (30 Mansfield Pl, Port Ellen; per hr £1; 🕒 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm


ISLAY, JURA & COLONSAY

0
12 km
0
6 miles
To Oban
Sea of the Hebrides
Kiloran
Kilchattan
Scalasaig
Isle of Colonsay
Isle of Oronsay
56°N
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Corryvreckan Whirlpool
To Oban (15.5mi)
Kilmartin
A816
Crinan
Crinan Canal
Lochgilphead
Beinn Bhreac (467m)
Tayvallich
Ardrishaig
Ardlussa
Isle of Jura
Sound of Jura
Loch Sween
Loch Fyne
Loch Tarbert
Lagg
A83
Achahoish
Sound of Islay
Beinn an Oir (784m)
Beinn a'Chaolais (734m)
Paps of Jura
Bunnahabhain
Leargybreck
Loch Caolisport
Knapdale
Tarbert
Gortantaoid
Kilnave Chapel
Loch Gruinart
Caol Ila
Finlaggan
Feolin
Port Askaig
Craighouse
Ford
Sanaigmore
Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve
Loch Finlaggan
West Loch Tarbert
Kennacraig
Whitehouse
Skipness
Kilchoman
Loch Gorm
Loch Indaal
Bridgend
Claonaig
Bruichladdich
Bowmore
Beinn Bheigeir (491m)
Clachan
Port Charlotte
A846
Isle of Islay
Ardtalla
Sound of Gigha
To Lochranza
Kildalton Cross
Isle of Gigha
Kilbrannan Sound
Portnahaven
Ellister
Glenegedale
Ardminish
Laggan Bay
Tayinloan
Pirnmill
Machrie
Arran
Kintra
Ardbeg
Port Ellen
Lagavulin
Laphroaig
Kintyre
Carradale
Mull of Oa
6°W
To Mull of Kintyre (25mi)
To Campbeltown (16mi)

Sun) Youth centre with several computers and a hexagonal pool table.

Tourist office (☎ 810254; The Sq, Bowmore; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) Helpful and friendly.

Sights & Activities

Eight **whisky distilleries** welcome visitors for guided tours. Most tours cost £3 to £5 and some are by appointment only. Most are only open Monday to Friday; Bruichladdich is open Saturdays, as are Bowmore and Kilchoman, which also open Sundays in July and August. Many of Islay's whiskies have a distinctive peaty taste; a quality particularly acute at the southerly distilleries of Ardbeg, Lagavulin and Laphroaig. By far the most charming to visit is **Bruichladdich** (☎ 850190; www.bruichladdich.com; tour £4) pronounced brook-*laddie,* located near Port Charlotte. It is one of Scotland's few distilleries to be independently owned. The enthusiasm here is palpable, and the refusal to compromise on quality is evident in its award-winning whiskies, which are fresh and light-bodied (although there's much experimentation going on here and always some intriguing new bottling being plotted). If you're going to visit any distillery in Scotland, make this the one. Tours are at 10.30am, 11.30am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday, and at 10.30am and 2.30pm Saturday. To get there, take a Port Charlotte–bound bus and jump off when you see the distinctive turquoise gates of the distillery. Drivers be warned, the complimentary dram(s) can be generous.

Another charmer is **Ardbeg** (☎ 302244; www.ardbeg.com; tour £4) which runs tours Monday to Friday; ring for times.

Not far away, the recently opened **Kilchoman** (☎ 850011; www.kilchomandistillery.com; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) is a farm distillery that aims to produce high-quality whisky using primarily its own barley, which is also malted here. It's worth visiting, although the first whisky won't be ready to drink until 2010 or so. There's a good-quality gift shop and café here, as well as a great farm-produce shop. Also here is the **Rockside Farm Trekking Centre** (☎ 850231), which will take you on horseback for an hour (£12) or, better, 2½ hours (£22), which takes you along the spectacular sands of Machir Bay.

There are Bronze Age relics, an illicit still, memorabilia and countless human stories relating Islay's long history at the quirky **Museum of Islay Life** (☎ 850358; Port Charlotte; adult/child £2.50/1; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, call for winter opening).

Islay was an early focus for Christianity. The exceptional 8th-century **Kildalton Cross** at Kildalton Chapel, 8 miles northeast of Port Ellen, is one of Scotland's few remaining Celtic high crosses.

In the capital, Bowmore, the **Round Church** was built in 1767 in this unusual shape to ensure the devil had no corners to hide in. He's more likely to be found in one of the distilleries.

More than 250 recorded bird species make Islay wonderful for **bird-watching**. It's an important wintering ground for white-fronted and barnacle geese, which outnumber the Ileachs 10 to one; local farms are hard hit when the squadrons land. For **seal-spotting**, you can't do better than at Portnahaven, at the island's southwestern tip. There are frequently dozens of the portly beasts basking in the small harbour.

Festivals & Events

The **Islay Festival of Malt & Music** in early June is a wonderful time to visit, but you'll need to book accommodation months in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

Distillery House (☎ 850495; mamak@btinternet.com; Port Charlotte; per person £25; Ⓟ 💻) The former Lochindaal distillery is now an excellent B&B run by a charming local couple who provide very homely and comfortable rooms and cheery service. Rooms have private bathroom, while an attractive new room with en suite has its own access. Happily, the owners also make cracking marmalade, jams, and oatcakes: nightmare eh? It's got no sign but is opposite the Islay SYHA hostel.

Lambeth Guest House (☎ 810597; lambethguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk; Jamieson St, Bowmore; B&B without bathroom per person £25) This is a great place to stay in Bowmore, just off the main street. You'll soon realise why the island has such a reputation for hospitality. Rooms are comfy and share good facilities (although they may be en suite by the time you arrive), and it feels like you're staying with friends. Breakfast is extremely tasty; you can also get a great home-cooked two-course dinner here for just £7.50.

Glenmachrie Guesthouse (☎ 302560; www.glenmachrie.com; s/d £60/90; Ⓟ) This peaceful and friendly farmhouse (including Highland cattle) is on the main road 4 miles north of Port Ellen, just south of the island's tiny airport. The owners know bucketloads about the island, and put on fabulous dinners – they use fresh local produce and can offer vegetarian on request. The breakfast is memorably good!

our pick **Harbour Inn** (☎ 810330; www.harbour-inn.com; Bowmore; s/d from £65/95) An absolute star on both the sleeping and eating fronts, this hospitable and courteous hotel overlooks Loch Indaal in the heart of Bowmore. Its rooms, which must be booked in advance (no single rates available over summer) are furnished attractively in lightwood furniture and are large and supremely comfortable. The classy restaurant (mains £16 to £23; open for lunch and dinner) showcases the very best of local game and seafood – the scallops are sensational – beautifully presented and served. Sip a whisky in the cane-furnished lounge while your food is prepared.

Bowmore Distillery Cottages (☎ 810671; www.bowmore.com; School St, Bowmore; cottage per night £60-250) These five charming self-catering cottages are situated in and around Bowmore distillery in the heart of the main town and are available for nightly or weekly rental. They vary widely in size; the petite Mashman's Cottage has just one bedroom, while the Old Bakery sleeps up to a baker's dozen. All are attractively furnished and have good facilities and varied charms; they are surprisingly well-priced and should usually be booked well ahead.

An Tigh Seinnse (☎ 860224; Portnahaven; dishes £6-15; ⏲ food noon-8pm) This is an exceedingly good spot at the island's southwestern tip, by the little harbour where the seals flop on the rocks. It's a cosy pub with outdoor seating, and is run by friendly folk who produce a range of very tasty Aga-cooked food, with changing specials that vary from cheerful snacks to gourmet plates. Plenty of vegetarian options. Locals still usually call it 'Maureen's'.

Other recommendations:

Islay SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1128; www.syha.org.uk; Port Charlotte; dm £11.50; ⏲ Apr-Oct) Clean. Well located. Somewhat gruff.

Lochside Hotel (☎ 810244; 19 Shore St, Bowmore; mains £5-8) Every whisky buff should pop in; there are around 400 malts on offer, with all sorts of rare bottlings. Decent bar meals and regular live music.

Port Charlotte Hotel (☎ 850360; Port Charlotte; mains £12-23; ⏲ bar food noon-2pm & 5.30-8pm, dinner 6.30-9pm; ♿) Classy Scottish cuisine, including good veg options, conservatory seating, and a cosy bar with a great selection of malts.

Getting There & Away

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) operates one to three flights per day from Glasgow to Islay (£60 to £150, 40 minutes).

CalMac has a ferry from Kennacraig to Port Ellen and another to Port Askaig (both per person/car return £13.80/73, 2¼ hours). They operate daily but on Sunday there is a ferry to Port Ellen only. Citylink buses from Glasgow connect with the ferry at Kennacraig. In summer there is a ferry on Wednesday between Port Askaig and Colonsay (per person/car one way £4.30/22.30, 1¼ hours) and on to Oban.

Getting Around

Islay Coaches (☎ 840273) and postbuses operate frequent services from Monday to Saturday (plus one Sunday service April to October) between all the main towns and villages. You'll probably need a taxi if you're doing serious distillery investigation – call **Lamont** (☎ 07899 756159), a larger-than-life character who clocks up 45,000 miles a year on this tiny island.

Islay's size makes it ideal to explore by bike and **Bowmore post office** (☎ 810366; Main St; ⏲ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) hires out mountain bikes for £10 per day.

ISLE OF JURA

☎ 01496 / pop 200 / elev 132m

The island where George Orwell wrote *1984* has a far higher population of deer than of people, who are outnumbered more than 30 to one. Almost treeless, it looms over the eastern end of Islay with fascinating menace. It's a walkers' paradise, with a wild landscape dominated by the island's stark, brooding peaks, the Paps of Jura (named for their breastlike shape). If you're not a hiker, there is little else to do, apart from visiting the **Isle of Jura Distillery** (☎ 820240; ⏲ tours 11am & 2pm Mon-Fri by appointment) in Craighouse, the island's only village. Orwell stayed in a cottage, **Barnhill** (☎ 01786-850274; per week from £450), at the far north of the island. If you're a fan or, like him, appreciate remote places, you may want to rent it – it sleeps eight.

Walking

The **Paps of Jura** provide a tough hill walk that requires good navigational skills and takes eight hours. Look out for adders – the island is infested with them, but they're shy snakes that'll move away as you approach.

A good place to start is by the bridge over the River Corran, about 3 miles north of

Craighouse. The first pap you reach is Beinn a' Chaolais (734m), then Beinn an Oir (784m) and finally Beinn Shiantaidh (755m). Most people also climb Corra Bheinn (569m) before joining the path that crosses the island to descend to the road.

Sleeping & Eating

Jura Hotel (☎ 820243; www.jurahotel.co.uk; Craighouse; s/d £58/88, without bathroom £45/72; Ⓟ) This family-run hotel opposite the distillery is a great place to stay and *the* place for a drink. The rooms at the front have fantastic views, but cost extra. There's good pub grub and excellent evening meals using local produce.

Getting There & Away

Jura is accessed via Islay. A small car ferry shuttles the five minutes between Port Askaig and Feolin (per person/car day-return £2.50/11) roughly hourly from Monday to Saturday, with six services on Sunday. A **bus service** (☎ 820314) runs three to five times a day from the ferry to Craighouse and to the north of the island. It meets some ferries, but some journeys are by request only, so call the day before.

ISLE OF COLONSAY

☎ 01951 / pop 110

Remote Colonsay is a delight, with unspoilt, lush green fields bordered by a rocky coastline and perilous cliffs, and superb beaches backed by machair and woodland. The island is in fact home to one of the most spectacular beaches in the Hebrides at **Kiloran Bay**, where Atlantic rollers thunder onto pure golden sands.

It's worth a stroll around the lovely subtropical gardens of **Colonsay House** (admission free; 🕒 walled garden noon-5pm Wed & 3-5pm Fri Easter-Sep), in Kiloran, known for their rhododendrons. Discreet wandering in the rest of the estate is allowed at times other than the ones given for the walled garden. Bring that midge repellent!

Grey seals are often seen around the coast and wild goats inhabit some of the neighbouring islets. At low tide you can walk across the strand to the small **Isle of Oronsay**, to the south, where the ruins of the priory date from the 14th century.

Sleeping & Eating

Colonsay Keeper's Lodge (☎ 200312; dm/tw £12/28; Ⓟ) In a great location on the edge of the ground of Colonsay House in a former gamekeeper's lodge near Loch Fada in Kiloran, this bunkhouse is a 30-minute walk from the ferry. The kitchen is well equipped and the lodgbe hires out bikes for £5 per day.

Isle of Colonsay Hotel (☎ 200316; www.colonsay.org.uk; Scalasaig; s £50, d £85-95; 🕒 ring ahead for winter opening) A 500m walk straight ahead from the ferry, the island's main hostelry is a plush 18th-century place with well-appointed rooms, some with lovely views and four-post beds. Its bistro serves bar meals and the more upmarket restaurant (mains £15 to £20) serves excellent Scottish cuisine, including a formidable 'Braveheart' sirloin topped with haggis and mustard.

Getting There & Away

CalMac has ferries to Scalasaig from Oban (per person/car £11.40/55, 2¼ hours) three to four times a week. In summer, there's an additional (Wednesday) sailing to Colonsay from Islay's Port Askaig (per person/car £4.30/22.30, 1¼ hours) and from Kennacraig on the Kintyre Peninsula (per person/car £11.40/55, 3½ hours). This sailing enables a day trip to Colonsay from Islay, with about six hours on the island. Timetables for these services change regularly, so check before making plans.

OBAN

☎ 01631 / pop 8120 / elev 64m

Oban sits on a delightful bay with sweeping views, and is a major point of departure for the Inner Hebrides, particularly Mull. In summer, it can be a little jammed, with the main street packed solid with traffic, but head a couple of miles out of town either way, and you can appreciate the beautiful coastal scenery without the crowds. The town itself hasn't got a huge amount to offer, but is attractively Victorian, all turrets and step gables, and has enough places to stay and eat to make it a decent stop for a night.

Orientation

The ferry terminal is at the southern end of town, next to the train station. North of here, the town is centred on George St, which runs north–south along the harbour. Most of the accommodation is at the northern end of town.

Information

Fancy That (☎ 562996; 108 George St; per hr £2; 🕒 9am-5pm, to 9pm summer) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 563122; info@oban.org.uk; Argyll Sq; 🕒 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 9am-7pm May-Sep) Helpful, busy and very well-stocked.

Sights & Activities

In the heart of town, corporate **Oban Distillery** (☎ 572004; Stafford St; tours £5; 🕒 Mon-Fri Feb-Mar & Nov-Dec, Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Oct, daily Jul-Sep), offers a tour and has been producing tasty Oban single malt whisky since 1794.

Atop the hill in town is **McCaig's Folly**, a curious Victorian recreation of the Colosseum!

It's a pleasant 20-minute walk north from the harbour along the coast to **Dunollie Castle**, built by the MacDougalls of Lorne in the 15th century. It's open all the time and very much a ruin. You could continue along this road to the beach at **Ganavan Sands**, 2.5 miles from Oban. Heading the other way, past the ferry terminal, it also becomes very scenic, and gets you, after a couple of miles, to the passenger ferry to the picturesque islet of Kerrera.

A tourist office leaflet lists regional **bike rides**. They include a 7-mile Gallanach circular tour, a 16-mile route to Seil Island, and routes to Connel, Glenlonan and Kilmore.

There are boat operators at the north end of the harbour offering excursions to see seals (£7); these leave every hour or so.

Sleeping

Book your rooms in advance if you're here between June and September. Beware the northern end of George St, where there's a racket involving outrageous prices for substandard rooms.

BUDGET

Jeremy Inglis Hostel (☎ 565065; 21 Airds Cres; dm £8.50, s/d £16/25) This unusual place is Oban's budget bargain. The homely rooms feel more like a B&B than a hostel and are adorned with flowers and cuddly toys. A Continental breakfast is included, which features the friendly, helpful owner's delicious homemade jam. If there's no-one at the hostel try its office (McTavish's) across the square from the tourist office, next to Argyll Bakeries.

Oban Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 562425; www.obancaravanpark.com; Gallanachmore Farm; tent sites £11-13; 🕒 Apr-Oct) In a great position on a lovely green hillside above the water, near the islet of Kerrera, 2.5 miles south of Oban towards Gallanach (turn right out of the ferry terminal), this camp site is a top spot to stay. Two buses a day from town stop outside.

Oban Backpackers Lodge (☎ 562107; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; Breadalbane St; dm £13.50; 💻) This big, colourful, clean place has a laid-back feel and is creatively decorated with cartoon characters and a big painted map on the wall. Facilities are great, with a large kitchen, a pool table and a sociable and very comfy front lounge. Breakfast is available for £1.90.

MIDRANGE

Sand Villa Guesthouse (☎ 562803; www.holidayoban.co.uk; Breadalbane St; r per person £23-28; Ⓟ) An attractive and reliable option, this efficiently run guesthouse has good-sized en-suite rooms more than a cut above the average. They are very appealing indeed, with a subtle sand theme and plenty of style and comfort – the beds are so snoozeworthy you might miss the early ferry! Breakfast includes fresh fruit.

Maridon Guest House (☎ 562670; Dunuaran Rd; s/d £28/50; Ⓟ) A hurled haggis from the ferry terminal, this cheerful blue house is hard to miss. The owner takes justifiable pride in the place, and is constantly making improvements and making sure guests are comfortable. Which they are: the rooms have space, soft carpets, large wooden beds, and modern bathrooms, as well as, in some cases, water views.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lunga House (☎ 01852-500237; www.lunga.com; Craobh Haven; B&B per person £25-30; Ⓟ 💻) This is a great spot; an affordable Scottish baronial mansion to stay in. It's a quirky, lovable place in beautiful grounds on a hillside above Craobh Haven, 24 miles south of Oban on the way to Kilmartin.

In the magnificent house itself, there are several beautiful old rooms which are gradually being refurbished by the charismatic laird (quite a character and a local visionary), as well as some self-catering flats. The mansion, which has a patina of age and a comfortable, lived-in feel, is bristling with history, antiques, portraits and character. It's a great place for kids, who are made welcome and will love roaming around the huge house and grounds. There are plenty of things to do around here, including a riding centre just down the hill. Dinner is also available by arrangement.

Kilchrenan House (☎ 562663; www.kilchrenanhouse.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; r per person £32-45; Ⓟ) This luscious property has elegant décor and a warm, friendly feel. Most of the thoughtfully furnished rooms have great views out over the water, but rooms five and nine are the best – room five has a huge freestanding bathtub, perfect for soaking weary bones. Porridge and kippers for breakfast!

TOP END

Manor House (☎ 562087; www.manorhouseoban.com; Gallanach Rd; B&B & dinner per person £74-94; Ⓟ wi-fi) This delightful small hotel is located in a lovely spot around the bay from town (turn right coming out of the ferry terminal), in an 18th-century building originally built by the Duke of Argyll to house his widowed mother. There are great views across to Oban; the rooms are decorated in sumptuous period style, and the salon and dining rooms are particularly luxurious. Dinner is a gourmet five-course affair; the restaurant (dinner £32.50) is also open to the public.

Eating & Drinking

Shellfish kiosks (Queens Park Pl; plates £2-5; 🕑 11am-7pm) These two excellent places on the harbour offer simple, sublime, seafood straight off the boats. Prices are incredibly reasonable: scallops lightly seared in lemon butter and served with brown bread would put many a pricey restaurant to shame and cost just £4.95.

Julie's (☎ 565952; 37 Stafford St; light meals £4-7; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the distillery, this cheerfully scatty tearoom serves up sandwiches and light meals (try the tasty smoked salmon), coffees, and toothsome treacle scones. There's also ice cream, and there are tables outside in case of good weather.

Studio (☎ 562030; Craigard Rd; 3-course dinner £15.95; 🕑 5.30-10pm) The folk of Oban love this place, and trembled with worry when new owners took it over. They need not have; it's still a great place to dine. With more space than before, although perhaps less conviviality, it offers high-quality, solid Scottish fare and other favourites. Try the Stornoway Steak, which comes with a slice of delicious Lewis black pudding atop it. There are comparably good options for vegetarians too.

Oban Inn (☎ 562484; Stafford St) Dating from 1790, this pub overlooks the harbour by the North Pier. It's got a timeworn, historic feel with low wooden beams; there's a great mix of people here, with posh yachties comparing tidal charts with gruff local fisherfolk.

Other recommendations:

Nevis Bakery (☎ 562262; 12 Stevenson St; snacks 80p-£2, light meals £2-4; 🕑 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Delicious scotch pies and hearty fry-ups.

Ee.Usk (☎ 565666; North Pier; mains lunch £6-10, dinner £13-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner; ♿) Bright, breezy, tasty. Smart seafood in a great contemporary harbourside location.

Oban Chocolate Company (☎ 566099; 9 Craigard Rd) Turn back ye sinners! Luscious hot chocolate and goodies made on-site.

Lorne Bar (☎ 570020; Airds Cr; 🕑 11am-1am) Island bar, beer garden, stained glass, polished brass. A good pub.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Numerous CalMac boats link Oban with the Inner and Outer Hebrides. In winter ferries run less often. There are ferries to Barra and South Uist (per person/car £21.10/77, five to six hours, four to seven times weekly); Coll (per person/car £12.90/75, 2¾ hours, five weekly); Colonsay (per person/car £11.40/55, 2¼ hours, three to six weekly, one weekly continues to Islay in summer only); Mull (per person/car £4.05/36, 45 minutes, five to seven daily); and Tiree (per person/car £12.90/75, four hours, daily).

BUS

Citylink runs buses to Oban from Glasgow (£13.10, three hours, two to three daily), Inveraray (one hour, two to three daily) and Fort William (£8.20, 1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday).

TRAIN

From Glasgow there are trains to Oban (£16.80, three hours, up to three daily), which is at the end of a scenic branch line that leaves the West Highland line at Crianlarich.

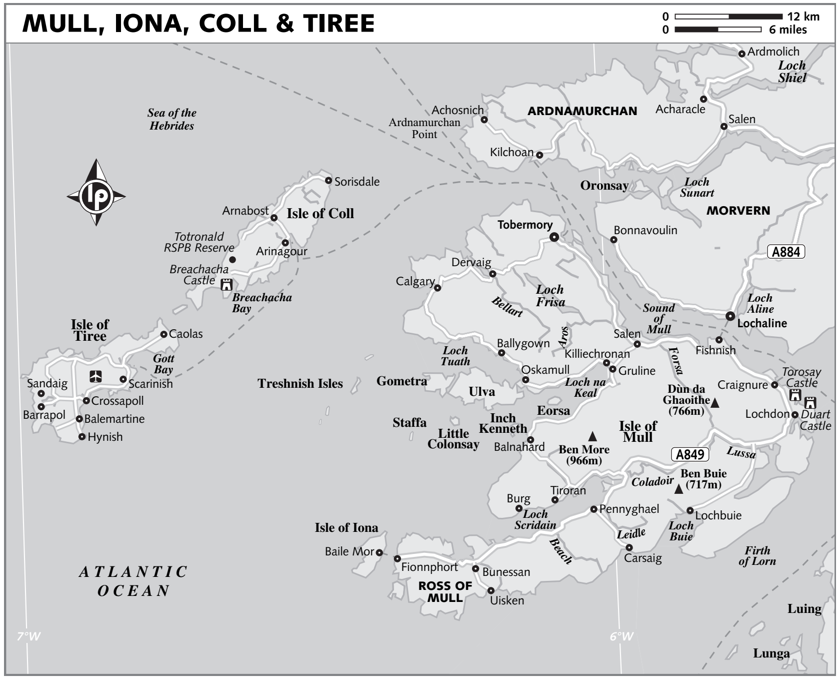
Getting Around

Liberty Cycle Hire (☎ 564000; www.libertycycles.co.uk; Mill Lane; 🕑 8am-7pm mid-Mar–Nov), near Tesco, rents out mountain bikes for £14 per 24 hours.

ISLE OF MULL

pop 2700 / elev 271m

As one of the most easily accessible of Scotland's islands, Mull is enduringly popular, and deservedly so, with its range of spectacular scenery, culminating in the angular hills dropping almost sheer into Loch na Keal. The enchanting holy island of Iona just offshore is another huge attraction, which can mean Mull gets a little busy in high season – make sure you reserve those ferries a few days in advance. Mull's main town, Tobermory, has lately experienced a boom of its own: it gets a huge dose of toddler tourism as it's the place where the kids' hit show *Balamory* is filmed.


MULL, IONA, COLL & TIREE
0 12 km
0 6 miles
Sea of the Hebrides
Ardmolich
Loch Shiel
Achosnich
Ardnamurchan Point
ARDNAMURCHAN
Acharacle
Salen
Kilchoan
Sorisdale
Arnabost
Isle of Coll
Oronsay
Loch Sunart
MORVERN
Totronald RSPB Reserve
Arinagour
Tobermory
Bonnavoulin
A884
Breachacha Castle
Breachacha Bay
Dervaig
Calgary
Loch Frisa
Bellart
Sound of Mull
Loch Aline
Lochaline
Isle of Tiree
Caolas
Salen
Fishnish
Ballygown
Aros
Loch Tuath
Killiechronan
Gott Bay
Oskamull
Gruline
Forsa
Torosay Castle
Sandaig
Scarinish
Treshnish Isles
Gometra
Loch na Keal
Dùn da Ghaoithe (766m)
Craignure
Crossapoll
Ulva
Eorsa
Barrapol
Balemartine
Lochdon
Duart Castle
Hynish
Staffa
Little Colonsay
Inch Kenneth
Balnahard
Ben More (966m)
Isle of Mull
A849
Lussa
Coladoir
Ben Buie (717m)
Tiroran
Burg
Loch Scridain
Pennyghael
Lochbuie
Isle of Iona
Leidle
Loch Buie
Baile Mor
Beach
Carsaig
Firth of Lorn
Fionnphort
Bunessan
ATLANTIC OCEAN
ROSS OF MULL
Uisken
Luing
7°W
6°W
Lunga

Orientation & Information

Two-thirds of Mull's population live in Tobermory, in the north. Most visitors to the island arrive at the ferry terminal Craignure, on the eastern coast. The island is large, and has mostly single-track roads, so don't try to 'do' it in a day – you'll end up exhausted.

There are tourist offices located at **Craignure** (☎ 01680-812377; 🕑 daily), opposite the ferry slip, and at **Tobermory** (☎ 01688-302182; Main St; 🕑 daily). Internet access is available at the **Posh Nosh Café** (☎ 302499; per 15min £1; 🕑 10am-9pm) in Tobermory.

Sights & Activities

Craignure is basically just a ferry stop, but from here you can catch the **Mull Rail** (☎ 01680-812494; www.mullrail.co.uk; adult/child return £4/3) narrow-gauge, miniature steam train that takes passengers 1.5 miles south to **Torosay Castle** (☎ 01680-812421; adult/child £5.50/2.75; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mar-Oct). This rambling Victorian mansion in the Scottish baronial style is set in a beautiful garden.

Two miles further on, **Duart Castle** (☎ 01680-812309; www.duartcastle.com; admission £4.50, 🕑 11am-4pm Sun-Thu Apr, 10.30am-5.30pm May–mid-Oct) is the ancestral seat of the Maclean clan and sits in a spectacular position on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Sound of Mull. A restoration removed some of the character of the 17th-century building, but you can still see the dungeons and appreciate the turbulent history of the castle and the clan who inhabited it. A bus to the castle meets some of the incoming ferries at Craignure.

Mull's capital is **Tobermory**, a sparkling little fishing port in the island's north. The brightly painted houses strung out along a sheltered bay surrounded by wooded hills, make this one of the prettiest villages in Scotland. Here, the **Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust** (☎ 01688-302620; 28 Main St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) is a research centre that has informative displays on the local marine population. It has information on various whale- and dolphin-spotting operators on Mull.

You can walk up **Ben More** (966m), the highest peak on Mull, which has spectacular views across to the surrounding islands when the weather is clear. A trail leads up the mountain from Loch na Keal, by the bridge on the B8035, about 8 miles southwest of Salen. Allow six hours for the return trip.

In the hamlet of Gruline is the **mausoleum** of Lachlan Macquarie, the enlightened fifth governor of New South Wales, a Mull native. It's a 500m walk off the main road in attractive farmland.

Sleeping & Eating

TOBERMORY

Tobermory SYHA (☎ 0870 004 1151; www.syha.org.uk; Main St; dm £13; 🕑 Mar-Oct; 💻) This appealing official hostel has a perfect location in Tobermory, and excellent facilities. It's right on the waterfront, with a colourful red façade and is a quiet, friendly place that welcomes families and outdoor types. There's a laundry and drying room, as well as an impressive kitchen.

Fàilte Guest House (☎ 01688-302495; www.failteguesthouse.co.uk; 27 Main St; s/d from £28/60) Happiness in Tobermory is a cosy B&B on the pretty, colourful waterfront, and this welcoming choice fits the bill perfectly. The rooms come with en suite and are decorated warmly, with nice Asian-print bedcovers and lovely gleaming white bathrooms. The best face out to the water, and have huge windows to take advantage of the privileged view.

Highland Cottage (☎ 01688-302030; www.highlandcottage.co.uk; Breadalbane St; d £125-160; 🕑 mid-Mar–mid-Oct, call for winter opening; 🅿) Tobermory's most comfortable and luxurious sleeping place, this small personable hotel sits on the hill above the harbour and offers friendly elegance, a warm welcome, and great food. It feels very cosy, with comfortable antique furniture in country-house style and rooms with a homely feel. Not that they lack facilities – crystal glasses, CD player, videos, books, and bathrobes are all here, among many other small touches. Dinner is a gourmet four-course affair (£37.50) that has a deservedly high reputation hereabouts; nonguests are welcome but book ahead!

Mishnish Hotel (☎ 01688-302009; Main St; bar meals £8-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This legendary pub is still the best spot to drink in town, with many a comfortable nook and cranny behind its black façade (someone will explain why it's not yellow like it is in the postcards). There's always something going on, and it has an interesting mix of locals and tourists. Large pub meals are good value.

Anchorage (☎ 302313; 28 Main St; mains £14-20; 🕑 10am-4pm & 6-9.30pm) This worthwhile restaurant is on the main drag and has a vaguely nautical theme. The French-influenced seafood is very tasty, with old favourites and new creations on show. It's very popular – if you don't book, you'll be having haddock supper from the chip van opposite (also good by the way!).

Other recommendations:

34 Main St (☎ 01688-302530; 34 Main St; s/d without bathroom £15/30) Three cosy attic rooms with good shared bathroom. Room-only, next to the supermarket. A bargain.

Island Bakery (☎ 01688-02223; Main St; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) British baking is still alive! The turkey, ham and cranberry pie is a champion among champions.

AROUND TOBERMORY

our pick **Achnadrish House** (☎ 01688-400388; achnadrish@hotmail.com; Dervaig Rd; r per person £30-40; 🅿) There aren't too many guesthouses in Scotland where you'll find pad thai on the breakfast menu, but this charming, upmarket B&B in an old shooting lodge between Tobermory and Dervaig is one. The welcoming, personable owner spends a lot of time in Southeast Asia and elegant Indochinese fabrics adorn the rooms, where small Buddhas watch over guests' slumbers. Ubiquitous are three ultrafriendly Labradors; it's that sort of relaxed retreat. There's also a self-catering cottage attached, which sleeps up to six (£400 to £600 per week) and has handsome original features, including the steep stair to what was once the hayloft.

Glengorm Castle (☎ 01688-302321; www.glengormcastle.co.uk; Glengorm; d £140-180; 🅿) This castle, bristling with turrets, enjoys an unforgettable location; huge windows showcase the memorable vistas of green fields sloping down to the water. The five bedrooms are all different, beautiful, and with character in spades. They have plenty of space – and, while very attractively furnished, are happily uncluttered. The place is run by lively young people, and kids will have a ball running around the grounds or admiring the sheep and Highland cattle.

CRAIGNURE

Shieling Holidays (☎ 01680-812496; www.shielingholidays.co.uk; Craignure; dm £10, shieling £26-39; 🕑 Apr-Oct; 🅿 ♿) This unusual place has a fabulous headland situation around the corner from the ferry. Its central concept is the tentlike 'shieling', which have tiled and carpeted floors, and offer the atmosphere of camping without banging in pegs. The more luxurious ones have running water, a toilet and a hot shower. Hostel-rate beds are available in simple shielings, and there's also a good-value cottage (per night £58) on-site.

Getting There & Away

CalMac ferries go from Oban to Craignure (per person/car £4.05/36, 45 minutes, five to seven daily). The shortest crossing links Fishnish, 6 miles northwest of Craignure, with Lochaline (per person/car £2.50/10.90, 15 minutes, at least hourly) on the Morvern Peninsula. From Tobermory a service runs to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula (per person/car £3.85/20.35, 35 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, plus five Sunday May to August).

Getting Around

Bowman's Coaches (☎ 01680-812313; www.bowmanstours.co.uk) operates a Craignure to Tobermory service (return £6.60, one hour, up to six daily Monday to Saturday, two to four on Sunday). There's also a bus connecting Craignure to Fionnphort (£10 return, 1¼ hours, up to four times daily Monday to Saturday, and once on Sunday) for the island of Iona.

Cycling is a good way to get around and you can rent bikes from a number of places. In Tobermory the great **Archibald Brown & Son** (☎ 01688-302020; 21 Main St) have mountain bikes at £13 per day.

ISLE OF IONA

☎ 01681 / pop 130

Iona, holy island and burial place of kings, lives up to its lofty reputation. From the moment you embark on the ferry towards its sandy shores and green fields, you'll notice something different about it. Iona is indeed special – but the crowds that pile off the tour buses sometimes make it difficult to appreciate; it's best to stay overnight.

Iona Abbey (HS; ☎ 700512; adult/child £4/1.60; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿) is the focus of the island and contains some of the most outstanding examples of stone carvings in Britain. Outside stands the magnificent 8th century **St Martin's Cross**; other crosses are in the small museum. The spectacular nave, dominated by high stone arches and wooden beams, is a highlight of the abbey – sitting outside is a bench with 'Be Still' etched into the woodwork, summarising the mood nicely.

St Columba landed on Iona from Ireland in 563 before setting out to convert Scotland. He established Iona's monastery, where the *Book of Kells* is believed to have been transcribed. The book was taken to Kells in Ireland when Viking raids drove the monks from Iona.

The monks returned and the monastery prospered until its destruction during the Reformation. The ruins were given to the Church of Scotland in 1899, and the abbey was reconstructed. It's still a flourishing spiritual community holding regular courses and retreats.

Next to the abbey is an ancient **graveyard** where a mound marks the burial place of 48 of Scotland's early kings, including Macbeth.

our pick **Iona Hostel** (☎ 700781; www.ionahostel.co.uk; dm £17.50; 🕑 check-in 4-7pm, ring for winter opening), one of Scotland's most relaxing places to stay, is at the end of the (only) road. Utterly rural and tranquil, it's part of a working croft and runs on sound ecological principles. Around are only lovable black Hebridean sheep and ducks, while nearby is a fabulous beach. What you won't find is a TV lounge – the welcoming owners and warden keep it a tech-free zone, the better to relax. There's also a self-catering cottage here (www.lagandorain.com).

A great place to eat or stay is the **Argyll Hotel** (☎ 700334; www.argyllhoteliona.co.uk; s/d £49/84, d without bathroom £66; 🕑 Mar-Oct), a place where you'll really feel looked after. It's a higgledy-piggledy sort of place, with a variety of rooms, as well as the dining room (lunch mains £4 to £11, dinner mains £10 to £15; food served from noon to 1.30pm and 7pm to 8.30pm March to October) with conservatory space looking out across the water back to Mull. Rooms with sea view cost more (doubles £118); there's also a fabulous furnished apartment (£158) with a hammock. Other rooms look out towards the back, where an organic garden turns out vegetables for the delicious meals.

From Fionnphort, at the southwestern extremity of Mull, a CalMac passenger ferry takes you to Iona (return £3.75, 10 minutes, frequent).

ISLE OF STAFFA

This uninhabited island off Mull is truly a magnificent sight, and once there you'll understand why it inspired Mendelssohn to compose *Hebridean Overture*. It forms the eastern end of that geological phenomenon (made up of massive, hexagonal basalt pillars) which begins in Northern Ireland where it's known as the Giant's Causeway. Here the pillars are called the **Colonnade** and form a series of cathedral-like caverns including **Fingal's Cave**, which pushes out of the sea like a grand pipe organ. Staffa is also visited by a sizeable **puffin colony**. The tourist offices on Mull book tickets for boat trips (adult/child around £17.50/7.50, three hours), most of which leave from Fionnphort.

ISLE OF COLL

☎ 01879 / pop 160

This windswept, sleepy little island, 7 miles west of Mull, isn't packed with visitor sites, but for many people that's the attraction. Ringed by sandy beaches, the island is an important refuge for the **corncrake**, which visits in summer; you can find out about it at the small RSPB post at Totronald. Nearby, **Breachacha Castles** are two fortified tower houses built by the Maclean Clan.

For accommodation the **Coll Hotel** (☎ 230334; www.collhotel.com; Arinagour; r per person £30-50; P), is a great spot, with quirky rooms, some with harbour views, and a cracking restaurant (mains £8 to £13) serving top-notch seafood and game.

CalMac ferries run to Coll from Oban (per person/car £12.90/75, 2¾ hours, five weekly), and continue to Tiree.

ISLE OF TIREE

☎ 01879 / pop 770

A low-lying island with some beautiful, sandy beaches, Tiree has one of the best sunshine records in Britain – there's nowhere for the clouds to get trapped. That's the good news. The bad news is, like Coll, the island is subject to howling Atlantic gales. The canny island, however, has turned this to its advantage. It's the windsurfing capital of Scotland; call **Wild Diamond Windsurfing** (☎ 220399; www.tireewindsurfing.com) for information; it also runs kitesurfing courses.

For accommodation **Kirkapol House** (☎ 220729; www.kirkapoltiree.co.uk; Gott Bay; s/d £29/54; P) is a very appealing converted 19th-century church, overlooking the island's best beach. Dinner is also available here.

British Airways flies from Glasgow to **Tiree airport** (☎ 220309) for around £60 to £150 return. CalMac ferries from Oban (per person/car £12.90/75, four hours, daily) arrive via Coll, and on Thursday also call at Barra.

STIRLING REGION

The Stirling region sits at the narrow waist of Scotland and has historically been a pivotal strategic point between the Lowlands and the Highlands. For this reason, it has seen more than its share of battles, including the freedom struggles of two of the greatest of Scottish heroes. William Wallace, portrayed in the film *Braveheart,* pursued his freedom struggle in these lands and is commemorated by a gigantic monument, which overlooks Bannockburn, where Robert the Bruce achieved Scotland's greatest military triumph.

Stirling itself boasts perhaps the country's most fascinating castle, perched on a crag high above the modern town. Northwest of here, the Trossachs is a region of stunning natural beauty and a top destination for walkers and cyclists, especially since it recently became joined with Loch Lomond as Scotland's first national park. The Trossachs was the home of yet another legendary Scot, Rob Roy, whose deeds, although somewhat less glittering than those of the freedom fighters, have earned him a Robin Hood–like position in north-of-the-border history.

Activities

There are numerous **walks** in the area, particularly in the Trossachs. Collins *Walk Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* (£5.99) is a useful guidebook available from tourist offices.

The Trossachs is also a great place for **cycling**, with several circular routes, as well as the **Lochs & Glens Way** that cuts across the region on its way from Glasgow to Inverness.

Getting Around

First (☎ 01324-613777; www.firstgroup.com) is the main bus operator. Stirling town is the rail hub, but the lines only skirt the region, so you'll be relying on buses if you don't have your own transport.

STIRLING

☎ 01786 / pop 32,700 / elev 47m

You can see Stirling for miles around, or at least the mighty crag on which its castle perches. This fortress is perhaps the most interesting of all Scottish castles to visit. Staring at it across a couple of miles of open country is the brooding Wallace monument, a strange Victorian Gothic creation honouring the giant freedom fighter of *Braveheart* fame. Nearby is Bannockburn, scene of Robert the Bruce's major triumph over the English.

Below the castle is Stirling's beautiful old town, somewhat reminiscent of Edinburgh with its noble old buildings that bear witness to the city's centuries at the forefront of Scottish power. Wandering the cobbled streets is a real pleasure, especially as the city boasts a couple of old pubs of huge character and charm, to quench your thirst at along the way.

Information

Library (Corn Exchange Rd; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Tue & Thu) Free internet.

Royal Burgh of Stirling Visitor Centre Just below the castle entrance.

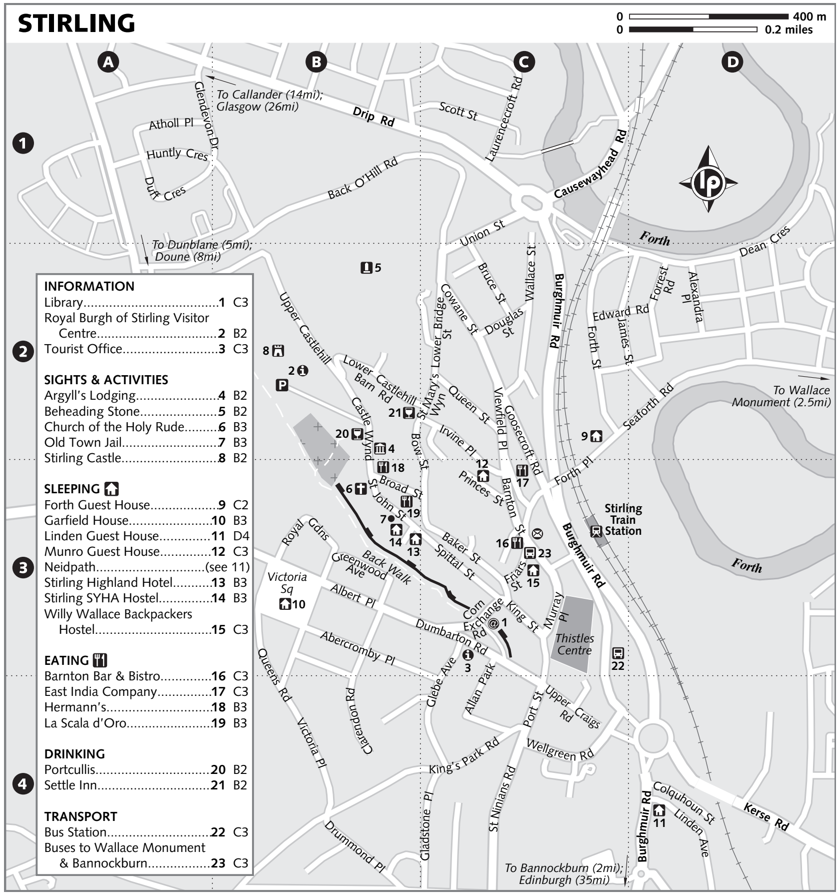
Tourist office (☎ 475019; stirlingtic@aillst.ossian.net; 41 Dumbarton Rd; ⏲ Mon-Sat Oct-May, daily Jun-Sep) Staff border on the hostile.

Sights

STIRLING CASTLE

Hold Stirling and you control the country. This simple maxim has ensured that a **castle** (HS; ☎ 450000; adult/child £8/3, audio tour extra £2; ⏲ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar; ♿) has existed here since prehistoric times. Commanding superb views, you cannot help drawing parallels with Edinburgh castle – but many find Stirling more atmospheric. The location, architecture and historical significance combine to make it one of the grandest of all Scottish castles. This means it draws plenty of

STIRLING


0
400 m
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A
B
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1
2
3
4
To Callander (14mi); Glasgow (26mi)
To Dunblane (5mi); Doune (8mi)
To Wallace Monument (2.5mi)
To Bannockburn (2mi); Edinburgh (35mi)
Drip Rd
Scott St
Back O'Hill Rd
Causewayhead Rd
Laurencecroft Rd
Glendevon Dr
Atholl Pl
Huntly Cres
Duff Cres
Union St
Forth
Dean Cres
Forrest Rd
Alexandra Pl
Edward Rd
James St
Forth St
Seaforth Rd
Burghmuir Rd
Upper Castlehill
Lower Castlehill
Barn Rd
Castle Wynd
St Mary's Wynd
Lower Bridge St
Cowane St
Bruce St
Douglas St
Wallace St
Queen St
Viewfield Pl
Goosecroft Rd
Irvine Pl
Bow St
Broad St
St John St
Princes St
Barnton St
Forth Pl
Stirling Train Station
Royal Gdns
Back Walk
Greenwood Ave
Victoria Sq
Albert Pl
Baker St
Spittal St
Friars St
Murray Pl
King St
Corn Exchange Rd
Dumbarton Rd
Abercromby Pl
Thistles Centre
Glebe Ave
Allan Park
Port St
Upper Craigs
Queens Rd
Victoria Pl
Clarendon Pl
King's Park Rd
Wellgreen Rd
St Ninians Rd
Gladstone Pl
Drummond Pl
Colquhoun St
Linden Ave
Kerse Rd

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visitors, so it's advisable to visit in the afternoon; many tourists come on day trips from Edinburgh or Glasgow, so you may have the castle to yourself by about 4pm.

The current building dates from the late 14th to the 16th century, when it was a residence of the Stuart monarchs. The spectacular palace was constructed by French masons in the reign of James V. The **Great Kitchens** are especially good, bringing to life the bustle and scale of the enterprise of cooking for the king.

An elaborate project to re-create the grandeur of the king's hall and queen's lodgings in the time of James V is underway. One of the most interesting parts of this is the making of a series of tapestries depicting the capture of a unicorn. The ones finished so far hang in the chapel; you can see the weavers at work in the **Tapestry Studio**. The handheld audio guide available at the castle entrance for an extra £2 is a worthwhile investment.

The **visitors centre**, just below, has useful audiovisual introductions to the castle's history and architecture. Last entry to the castle is an hour before closing. There's a car park outside (£2).

Complete with turrets, the spectacular **Argyll's Lodging** (admission free with castle ticket, otherwise £4) – by the castle at the top of Castle Wynd – is the most impressive 17th-century town house in Scotland. It's the former home of William Alexander, an earl of Stirling and noted literary figure.

OLD TOWN

Below the castle, the old town has a remarkably different feel compared with modern Stirling, its cobblestone streets packed with fine examples of 15th- to 17th-century architecture.

Stirling has the best **town wall** in Scotland; built around 1547 it can be followed on the **Back Walk**. The walk follows the line of the wall from Dumbarton Rd (near the tourist office) up to the castle through peaceful woodland. You pass the town cemeteries, and you could make a short detour to Gowan Hill to see the **Beheading Stone**, now encased in iron bars to keep ritual axe murderers away.

The **Church of the Holy Rude** (St John St; admission free; 🕒 11am-4pm May-Sep) is just down the hill from the castle and has been the town's parish church for 500 years. James VI was crowned here in 1567. The nave and tower date from 1456 and the church features one of the few surviving medieval open-timber roofs.

The **Old Town Jail** (☎ 450050; St John St; adult/child £5.95/3.95; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct & Mar, 10.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) is something of a tourist trap but is undeniably entertaining for the kids, as actors in costume portray the hardships of prison life in an entertaining and innovative style. The actors are weekends-only between November and March. Last entry is one hour before closing.

NATIONAL WALLACE MONUMENT

Two miles north of Stirling is this towering Victorian Gothic **monument to William Wallace** (☎ 472140; www.nationalwallacemonument.com; adult/child £6/4; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-May & Oct, 10am-6pm Jun, 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Sep, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Feb), who was hung, drawn and quartered by the English in 1305 and was portrayed by Mel Gibson in the film *Braveheart*. The view, from the top, of seven battlegrounds – one of them at Stirling Bridge where Wallace defeated the English in 1297 – is as breathtaking as the climb. The monument contains interesting displays including a parade of other Scottish heroes and Wallace's mighty broadsword. Clearly the man was no weakling.

Local buses 62 and 63 run from Murray Pl in Stirling to the visitors centre, from where free shuttle buses run up the hill to the monument itself. Otherwise, it's about a half-hour walk from the centre of Stirling.

BANNOCKBURN

On 24 June 1314 the greatest victory in Scotland's struggle to remain independent from the English took place at the Battle of Bannockburn. Robert the Bruce overcame superior numbers and sent Edward II's English force packing. At the **Bannockburn Heritage Centre** (NTS; ☎ 812664; adult/child £5/4; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct; ♿) the story is told in a simple and eloquent exhibition, including an audiovisual display. There is also a handy timeline of events. Bannockburn is 2 miles south of Stirling; the battle site itself never closes. You can reach the site on bus 51 from Murray Pl in the centre of Stirling.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Willy Wallace Backpackers Hostel (☎ 446773; www.willywallacehostel.com; 77 Murray Pl; dm £14, tw £30-35; 💻) This highly convenient central hostel is friendly, spacious, and sociable. The dormitories are large and light, there's free tea and coffee, a good kitchen, and a relaxing atmosphere. Other amenities include a laundry service and Sass, the exuberant hostel dog. The helpful folk here will make an onward booking for you, free of charge.

Stirling SYHA Hostel (☎ 473442; www.syha.org.uk; St John St; dm/tw £15/£35; Ⓟ 💻 ♿) In a perfect location on the way up to the castle in the old town, this hostel is concealed behind the façade of an old church. Once inside, however, it's clean, efficient and modern. The facilities are excellent, and include a pool table. The dorms are small but well equipped, there's a handful of twins with single beds, and there's access until 2am.

MIDRANGE

Forth Guest House (☎ 471020; www.forthguesthouse.freeserve.co.uk; 23 Forth Pl; s/d from £20/46) You can't miss this small Georgian terrace just over the bridge near the train station: its façade and front garden are a riot of blooming flowers possibly visible from orbit. The rooms are ultracommodious and furnished with style but no frippery. Bathrooms are modern, and the top-floor rooms with their sloping ceilings are especially lovable. There's easy parking outside, an important consideration in Stirling.

Munro Guest House (☎ 472685; www.munroguesthouse.co.uk; 14 Princes St; s/d £30/50; Ⓟ) This snug B&B is right in the centre of town, but on a quiet side street. It's run by friendly people and has smallish but comfortable rooms, including some attractive attic ones. The walls are hung with Vettriano prints. The breakfast is also better than the norm, with fruit salad on hand. There's easy (pay) parking opposite.

Garfield House (☎ 473730; 12 Victoria Sq; s/d £35/58) In a quiet and attractive Victorian part of Stirling, this loveable old mansion makes a characterful place to stay. There's a patina of age about the place, but its huge rooms, bay windows, and old-fashioned elegance make it a top choice.

Linden Guest House (☎ 448850; www.lindenguesthouse.co.uk; 22 Linden Ave; s/d £40/55; Ⓟ) Handy for the bus station, this is one of several good choices on this street. There are four rooms, attractively furnished and with comfortable beds; two are suitable for families. The breakfast is especially good, with fresh fruit, and plenty of choice, including kippers.

Neidpath (☎ 469017; 24 Linden Ave; s/d £35/48; Ⓟ) Next door to Linden, this is friendly and comfortable, and a more than acceptable alternative.

TOP END

Stirling Highland Hotel (☎ 272727; www.paramount-hotels.co.uk; Spittal St; s/d £130/160; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi ♿) The town's smartest hotel is a sympathetic refurbishment of the old high school. Although the public areas still feel a little institutional, the rooms are of the highest comfort, and the facilities, which include pool, spa, gym, sauna and squash courts, are a rarity for a city-centre hotel in these parts. There's a decent restaurant too; check the website before booking, as there are often good dinner, bed and breakfast offers.

Eating

Barnton Bar & Bistro (☎ 461698; 312 Barnton St; snacks £4-6; 🕒 10am-late) Opposite the main post office, this popular student hang-out serves an all-day breakfast of William Wallace proportions (£4.95) and scrumptious baguettes as well as a range of typical lunches. It's also not a bad spot for a beer or two of an evening.

our pick **East India Company** (☎ 471330; 7 Viewfield Pl; mains £5-10; 🕒 5pm-midnight) This basement Indian restaurant is one of the best spots in Scotland for a curry. Sumptuously decorated to resemble a ship's stateroom, with portraits of tea barons on the wall to conjure images of the days of the clippers, the restaurant offers exquisite dishes from all parts of India. There's a buffet dinner available (£11.95; Sunday to Thursday), but you're better off going à la carte, and savouring the astonishingly toothsome flavours.

Hermann's (☎ 450632; 58 Broad St; 2-course lunch £10.50, mains £14-19; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This quiet Scottish-Austrian restaurant is one of Stirling's more elegant choices. Focus on the solid wooden tables or the bright back conservatory rather than the tartan carpet and misplaced wildlife photos, and enjoy anything from Cullen skink or venison stew to schnitzel and spätzle. There's always a tempting vegetarian option, and you can accompany your meal with Austrian wines, which are of pleasing and delicate quality.

La Scala d'Oro (☎ 274010; Jail Wynd; snacks £3-8, 3-course meal £23.95; 🕒 bar 11am-1am Tue-Sun, restaurant lunch & 5-9.30pm; ♿) At the back of the arts centre, the café-bar serves decent coffee (gold dust in Stirling) and tasty paninis and pasta; it's also a trendy spot for a drink. The restaurant serves upmarket and tasty Scottish-Italian fare.

Drinking

our pick **Settle Inn** (☎ 474609; St Mary's Wynd; 🕒 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9.30pm Sun) Stirling's oldest pub is a gem. The cheery staff go beyond the call to make both visitors and locals feel at home, and there's always an interesting guest ale on tap. There are plenty of atmospheric nooks for settling down with a whisky against the winter chills too.

Portcullis (☎ 472290; Castle Wynd) This gracious old pub is another fine drinking option. With an atmospheric beer garden, this stonebuilt former primary school serves good ales and malts and has a cosy buzz inside on winter evenings. Food (bar meals £7 to £16; open for lunch and dinner) is served until 9pm, but you may need an hour or so to get through the massive portions.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Citylink services include Dundee (£8, hourly), Edinburgh (£4.20, one hour, hourly, also operated by First), Glasgow (£4.20, 45 minutes, hourly) and Perth (£4.90, 50 minutes, half-hourly).

TRAIN

Half-hourly services run to Edinburgh (£5.90, 50 minutes) and Glasgow (£6.10, 40 minutes). There are hourly services to Perth (£8.90, 30 minutes), Dundee (£13.70, 50 minutes) and Aberdeen (£33.50, two hours).

AROUND STIRLING

Dunblane

☎ 01786 / pop 7900

Dunblane, 5 miles northwest of Stirling, is a small, pretty town with a couple of good attractions. It is difficult not to associate the town with the horrific massacre that took place in the primary school in 1996 but happier headlines have come to the town through the successes of young tennis star Andy Murray, who hails from here. For visitor information, contact the **tourist office** (☎ 824428; Stirling Rd; 🕒 May–mid-Sep).

Dunblane Cathedral (HS; ☎ 823388; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, closes 4.30pm Oct-Mar) is the main attraction and it's well worth a detour. The elegant, sandstone building is a superb example of Scottish Gothic. A standing stone commemorates the slain children, while there's also a 10th-century carved Celtic stone at the head of the nave.

First runs frequent buses to Dunblane from Stirling. Trains to Dunblane run every 15 to 30 minutes from Stirling.

Doune

☎ 01786 / pop 1635

Eight miles northwest of Stirling, this town has a great attraction in **Doune Castle** (HS; ☎ 841742; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar), one of the best-preserved 14th-century castles in Scotland, having remained largely unchanged since it was built for the Duke of Albany. It was a favourite royal hunting lodge; Mary Queen of Scots stayed here, as did Bonnie Prince Charlie – the first as a guest, the second as a prisoner. There are great views from the castle walls and the lofty gatehouse is impressive, rising nearly 30m. Many visitors come for the Monty Python connection: the castle featured in the *Holy Grail.*

First buses connect to Stirling (30 minutes) roughly hourly from Monday to Saturday, less frequently on Sunday.

THE TROSSACHS

The outstandingly attractive Trossachs offers a region of forested hills and achingly beautiful lochs within easy reach of the cities of southern Scotland. It forms the eastern part of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park. The Trossachs offer excellent walking and cycling opportunities, especially if you get off the more established routes.

The Trossachs first gained popularity as a tourist destination in the early 19th century, when curious visitors came from all over Britain drawn by the romantic language of Sir Walter Scott's poem *Lady of the Lake,* inspired by Loch Katrine, and *Rob Roy,* about the bravado and derring-do of the region's most famous son.

In summer the region can be overburdened with coach tours, but many of these are day-trippers, so peaceful, long evenings gazing at the reflections in the nearest loch are still possible. If you have the choice, it's worth timing a visit so as not to coincide with a weekend.

Aberfoyle & Around

☎ 01877 / pop 575 / elev 87m

Aberfoyle is a sort of gateway town to the Trossachs, and is often inundated with tour buses. There are some very scenic spots nearby, but the town itself needn't detain you. Callander, or somewhere small, is a better base for the area.

Aberfoyle is on the eastern edge of the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, which stretches right across to the hills beside Loch Lomond. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0604; Main St; 🕒 daily Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) with internet access for £1.80 per 15 minutes. There's also information at the **Queen Elizabeth Forest Park Visitors Centre** (☎ 382258; parking fee £1; 🕒 10am-6pm Mar–mid-Dec) which has audiovisual displays and information about the many walks and cycle routes in and around the park. The centre is half a mile north of town, up the hill.

SIGHTS

Four miles east of Aberfoyle off the A81 is **Lake Menteith** (the reason it's a lake not a loch comes down to a mistranslation from Gaelic). The substantial ruins of **Inchmahome Priory** (HS; ☎ 385294; adult/child incl ferry £4/1.60; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep), where Mary Queen of Scots was kept safe as a child during Henry VIII's 'Rough Wooing' (when Henry attacked Stirling to force Mary Queen of Scots to marry his son in order to unite the kingdoms), are on a picturesque island in the middle of the lake. A boat takes visitors from the village to the Augustinian priory; the last outbound boat is 5.15pm.

WALKING & CYCLING

Several picturesque but busy waymarked trails start from the forest park visitors centre above town. These range from a light 20-minute stroll to a nearby waterfall to a tough, hilly 5-mile circuit.

An excellent 20-mile circular cycle route links with the **ferry** (☎ 376316) at Loch Katrine. From Aberfoyle, join the Lochs & Glens Cycle Way (see p826) on the forest trail, or take the A821 over Duke's Pass. Following the southern shore of Loch Achray, you reach the pier on Loch Katrine. The ferry (see p845) can take you to Stronachlachar (£5.50) on the western shore; from Stronachlachar, follow the beautiful B829 via Loch Ard to Aberfoyle.

SLEEPING & EATING

Forth Inn (☎ 382372; Main St; bar meals £5-6, mains £6-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner; P) In the middle of the village, this place is all things to the weary traveller. It's a great spot for a drink and for value-packed pub grub. It's often full of coach parties during the day, but if you head on down in the evening you'll find a much more enjoyable local atmosphere. The rooms are bright and pink-tinged with solid, modern furniture and good bathrooms (single/double £45/70).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

First buses connect Aberfoyle to Stirling (45 minutes, up to four daily). For details of the useful Trossachs Trundler service, see p845.

Callander

☎ 01877 / pop 2750 / elev 130m

Callander has been pulling in the tourists for more than 150 years, especially domestic day-trippers who make the town a little overcrowded at weekends. However, it's a good base to explore the surrounding area and a pleasant spot to just stroll about.

The busy but helpful **Rob Roy & the Trossachs Visitors Centre** (☎ 0870 720 0628; info@robroyvisitorcentre.com; Ancaster Sq; 🕒 daily; ♿) is also the tourist office. A Rob Roy audiovisual (£3.85) gives some insight into the famous man.

SLEEPING

Trossachs Tryst (☎ 331200; www.scottish-hostel.co.uk; dm £15, self-catering f per person £15-20; P 💻 wi-fi ♿) This

ROB ROY

Robert MacGregor (1671–1734) was the wild leader of the wildest of Scotland's clans, Clan Gregor. Roy is an Anglicisation of the Gaelic 'ruadh' (red): he was nicknamed for his ginger locks. Although he claimed direct descent from a 10th-century king of the Scots and rights to the lands the clan occupied, these estates stood between powerful neighbours who had the MacGregors outlawed, hence their sobriquet 'Children of the Mist'. Adopting another surname, Rob became a prosperous livestock trader, before a dodgy deal led to a warrant for his arrest.

A legendary swordsman, the fugitive from justice then became notorious for his daring raids into the Lowlands to carry off cattle and sheep. He was forever hiding from potential captors; he was twice imprisoned, but escaped dramatically on both occasions. He finally turned himself in, and received his liberty and a pardon from the king. He lies buried in the churchyard at Balquhidder, by Loch Voil (see the boxed text, p844); his uncompromising epitaph reads 'MacGregor despite them'. His life has been glorified over the years due to Sir Walter Scott's novel and the 1995 film. Many Scots see his life as a symbol of the struggle of the common folk against the inequable ownership of vast tracts of the country by landed aristocrats.

WORTH THE TRIP

The village of **Balquhidder** (bal-whidder), 11 miles northwest of Callander, is famous as being the final resting place of Rob Roy, who is buried with his wife and two sons in the small churchyard. No less a drawcard is the sublime hotel and restaurant **Monachyle Mhor** (☎ 01877-384622; www.monachylemhor.com; lunch from £31, dinner from £44; 🕒 lunch & dinner; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi ♿ restaurant only). With a fantastic location overlooking two lochs, this is an excellent fusion of country Scotland and comfortable contemporary design. The rooms and suites are fabulous, with quirkily original décor, and various price grades (doubles from £95 to £220). The restaurant (open to the public) offers set lunch and dinner menus which are high in quality and deliciously innovative. Monachyle Mhor's enchantment lies in its successful combination of top-class hospitality and service with a relaxed rural atmosphere; dogs and kids happily romp on the lawns, and no-one looks askance if you come in flushed and muddy after a day's fishing or walking.

Balquhidder is 2 miles west of the A84, 9 miles north of Callander. The hotel is a further 4 miles beyond the village.

purpose-built hostel is in a beautifully isolated spot a mile from Callander. The dorms are excellent, very spacious with four or six beds and have their own bathroom. Rates include Continental breakfast, and there's a helpful, easygoing atmosphere. An appealing lounge space has big windows looking out across the countryside, and there's on-site cycle hire and advice. To get there, take Bridge St off Main St, then turn right onto Invertrossachs Rd and follow it for a mile.

Abbotsford Lodge (☎ 330066; www.abbotsfordlodge.co.uk; Stirling Rd; s/d from £30/60; Ⓟ) On the main road on the eastern side of town (look for the monkey puzzle), this beautiful old Victorian home has recently been the subject of an extremely tasteful renovation under new owners. They've consigned tartan carpets and florals to the bonfire, sanded back the floorboards, and brightened the rooms up with smart white linen. It's a friendly place, and good to relax in, with a lounge and conservatory space where lunches are served.

Arden House (☎ 330235; www.ardenhouse.org.uk; Bracklinn Rd; s/d £35/65; 🕒 Apr-Oct; Ⓟ) Very close to the centre, but well away from cars and crowds, this guesthouse is a wonderful place for grown-ups (no kids under 14 allowed) and was used as the setting for the TV series *Doctor Finlay's Casebook*. The rooms, named for characters in the show, are decorated with faultless taste and include a suite with great views. The hosts are solicitous and enjoy a good conversation.

our pick **Roman Camp Hotel** (☎ 330003; www.romancamphotel.co.uk; s/d/superior d £75/125/165; Ⓟ ♿) This mansion is in the centre of Callander but feels like a remote country hotel as it's set by the river in its own beautiful grounds. Its endearing features include a lounge with blazing fire, as well as a library with a tiny secret chapel. There are three grades of room; the standards are certainly luxurious, but the superior ones are even more appealing, with period furniture, armchairs, and a fireplace. The restaurant is open to the public and excellent (dinner £44). And fear not; the name refers not to toga parties but to a ruin in the adjacent field.

EATING & DRINKING

Lade Inn (☎ 330152; Kilmahog; bar meals £4-9; 🕒 food noon-9pm). A mile north of town, this sociable local is the sort of appealing and inviting place that leaves you wondering where your afternoon went to. It's child-friendly, does decent bar meals, and serves a good pint of ale, sometimes home-brewed. There's live music at weekends.

our pick **Callander Meadows** (☎ 330181; 24 Main St; lunch £6.95, mains £9-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Sun, plus Mon Apr-Sep, plus Wed Jul & Aug) Run by a friendly chef couple, this is that rare beast that combines sophisticated, delicious cuisine with prices that are surprisingly reasonable: if you have lunch here for seven quid, you'll feel like Rob Roy after a successful cattle raid. The dishes are prepared with flair and presented with style in a relaxed, cheerful atmosphere. Make sure you leave room for dessert. Upstairs there are three very appealing rooms (£46 to £54) elegantly kitted out with dark-varnished furnishings and striped wallpaper (one has a four-post bed).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Morrison's buses from Stirling (45 minutes) run hourly from Monday to Saturday and less frequently on Sunday.

There is also a Citylink bus between Edinburgh (£9.60, 1¾ hours, one daily) and Fort William (£14, 2¼ hours, one daily), stopping here.

The vintage **Trossachs Trundler** (☎ 01786-442707) is a useful hop-on hop-off bus service that does a circuit including Callander, Aberfoyle, Port of Menteith and Loch Katrine. The bus operates daily (except Wednesday), June to September; a day ticket costs £8; the service is wheelchair accessible. Alternatively, postbus 24 does the same circuit twice daily Monday to Friday (once on Saturday).

GETTING AROUND

Based at Trossachs Tryst, the excellent **Wheels Cycling Centre** (☎ 331100; www.scottish-cycling.co.uk) hires out bikes per half-/full day for £7.50/12.50.

Loch Katrine

The rugged area around this beautiful loch, 6 miles north of Aberfoyle and 10 miles west of Callander, is the heart of the Trossachs. Two **boats** (☎ 01877-376316; www.lochkatrine.com) run cruises from Trossachs Pier at the eastern tip of the loch (£6.50, 45 minutes). Two daily departures head across to the other end at Stronachlachar before returning (return £7.50). From there (accessible by car via Aberfoyle), you can reach the eastern shore of Loch Lomond at isolated Inversnaid. A tarmac path links Trossachs Pier with Stronachlachar, so you can also take the boat out and walk/cycle back (12 miles).

KILLIN

☎ 01567 / pop 670 / elev 183m

This lovely village sits at the western end of Loch Tay (see also p858) and is a great little place. Roaring through the centre are the scenic **Falls of Dochart**: on a sunny day people sprawl over the rocks by the bridge, pint or picnic in hands, and a top spot it is too. Killin is an excellent base for a few nights; there's some fine walking around the town, and several mighty mountains and glens close at hand.

The helpful, informative **tourist office** (☎ 0870 720 0627; Main St; 🕒 daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Feb) is in the Breadalbane Folklore Centre.

Walking & Cycling

Five miles northeast of Killin and rising above Loch Tay is Ben Lawers (1214m; see p859). Other walks around Killin abound; grab the ParkPaths map from a tourist office. One rewarding circular walk heads up into the Acharn forest south of town, emerging above the tree-line to great views of Loch Tay and Ben Lawers.

Killin is on the Lochs & Glens cycle route (see p826) from Glasgow to Inverness.

Sleeping & Eating

The best eating spots in town are the hotels. The Killin is reliable and serves tasty food. The Falls of Dochart Inn is a great spot fallen on strange times – it had mislaid both its liquor licence and its courtesy at time of research.

Killin SYHA (☎ 0870 004 1131; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13; 🕒 Mar-Oct) This popular hang-out for walkers is a friendly spot with a good kitchen, efficient drying room, and clean dorms. It's situated in a lovely Victorian mansion at the northern end of the village about a mile from the centre on the main road.

our pick **Drumfinn Guest House** (☎ 820900; www.drumfinn.co.uk; Main St; s/d £30/56; Ⓟ) What a great spot this is. The appealing, comfortable rooms – with soft toys for company – are recommendation enough, but add the fabulous welcome to that and you're in B&B heaven. The über-friendly hosts offer great advice on where to go, especially for walkers. But you might struggle to bag some of the Munros hereabouts with the delicious, generous breakfast on board!

Getting There & Away

There are buses roughly hourly from Killin to Callander and Stirling and a service to Kenmore four times daily Monday to Friday, but not in July or August. There is also a postbus service (202) between Aberfeldy and Killin (1½ hours, Monday to Saturday).

Killin is on the Citylink bus route linking Perth (£4.50, 1¼ hours) and Oban (£8.40, 1½ hours); there are two buses each way daily.

FIFE

Fife can feel quite different from the rest of Scotland, partly due to its geographical position. A tongue of land between the Firths of Forth and Tay, it is still mostly accessed by bridges and indeed feels something like an island. It was home to generations of Scottish monarchs and still likes to style itself 'The Kingdom of Fife'.

Although southern Fife's proximity to Edinburgh has lead to overdevelopment and a commuter-belt feel, the rest of the county is enchanting. Rolling, tumbling, lush farmland dominates the countryside, while the coast is dotted with fishing villages where you can munch on fresh local crabs while gazing across the Firth of Forth. In the west, the dignified village of Culross is an incredibly well-preserved 17th-century burgh.

Fife's biggest attraction is St Andrews, whose university is the oldest in Scotland. It has a wealth of stately buildings and, as the birthplace and headquarters of golf, draws professionals and keen slashers alike to take on the Old Course and its blustery conditions.

Getting Around

Fife Council produces a useful transport map, *Getting Around Fife,* available from tourist offices, bus and train stations and has a **Public Transport Information Line** (☎ 01334-412902). **Stagecoach** (☎ 01383-511911; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main bus operator.

ST ANDREWS

☎ 01334 / pop 14,200 / elev 33m

The home of golf, and Scotland's oldest university town, St Andrews is a small, prosperous place that's a very appealing spot to visit even if you're not a fan of the world's most frustrating game. There's an impressive concoction of medieval ruins and idyllic coastal scenery here, as well as the stately buildings of the university itself. Prince William is just one of many famous St Andrews graduates.

The Old Course, the world's most famous, has a striking seaside location at the western end of town. Although it's difficult to get a game (see the boxed text, p848), it's still a thrilling experience to stroll the hallowed turf. Between the students and the golfers, St Andrews can feel like the least Scottish of places as, although technically a city, it's very small.

History

It's believed that St Andrews was founded by the Greek monk St Regulus in the 4th century. He brought important relics from Greece, including some of the bones of St Andrew, who became Scotland's patron saint.

The town soon grew into a major pilgrimage centre for the shrine of the saint and developed into an ecclesiastical centre. Scotland's first university was founded here in 1410.

Golf has been played here for more than 600 years; the Royal & Ancient Golf Club was founded in 1754 and the imposing clubhouse was built a hundred years later.

Orientation & Information

St Andrews preserves its medieval plan of parallel streets with small closes leading off them. The old town stretches east from the bus station, with Market St running east–west between North St and South St. The Old Course stretches northwest of town. The old university buildings are integrated into the central part of the town. There's a small harbour below the cathedral and two excellent sandy beaches.

Useful businesses:

Costa Coffee (Market St; per hr £3; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Internet access.

St Andrews Library (☎ 412685; Church Sq; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 9.30am-7pm Tue-Thu) Free internet access upstairs. Several terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 472021; www.standrews.com; standrews@visitfife.com; 70 Market St; 🕑 Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, daily Apr-Oct) Mountains of information about Fife.

Sights

ST ANDREWS CATHEDRAL & RULE'S TOWER

The ruins of St Andrews' once-mighty **cathedral** (HS; ☎ 472563; cathedral & castle £6, cathedral only £3.50; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿) have been described as 'the greatest achievement in Scottish medieval architecture'. It was once the largest – and one of the most magnificent cathedrals – in the country, and it's possible to get a sense of its immensity from the remaining but ruined western end.

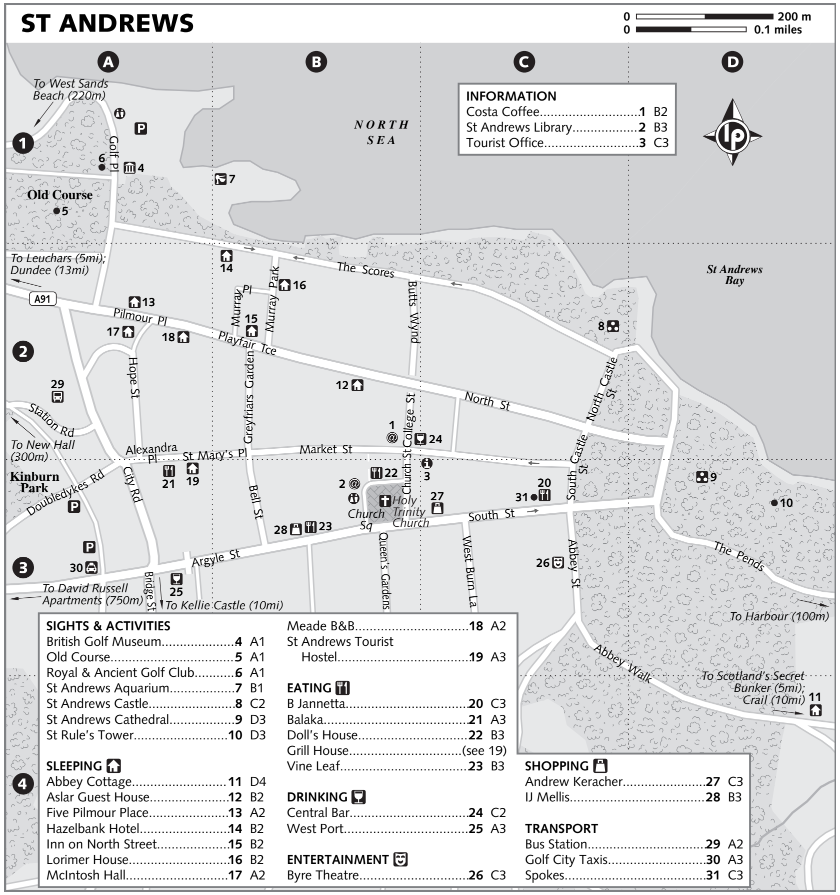
Although it was founded in 1160, it was not consecrated until 1318. It stood as the focus of this important pilgrimage centre until 1559, when it was pillaged during the Reformation.

St Andrews' supposed bones lay under the high altar; until the cathedral was built, they had been enshrined in the nearby Church of St Regulus (St Rule). All that remains is **St Rule's Tower**, well worth the climb for the view across St Andrews and a great place for taking photographs. The visitors centre includes a **museum** with a collection of Celtic crosses and gravestones found on the site. There's an entry fee for access to the museum and St Rule's Tower, but the ruins you can absorb freely.

ST ANDREWS CASTLE

With dramatic coastline views, **St Andrews castle** (HS; ☎ 477196; cathedral & castle £6, castle only £4.50; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿), round from the cathedral, is mainly in ruins, but the site itself is evocative. The most interesting thing to see is the complex of **siege tunnels**, said to be the best surviving example of castle siege engineering in Europe. You can walk along the damp, mossy tunnels, lit by electric lights – but be warned, it helps if you're short!

The castle was founded around 1200 as the fortified home of the bishop. In the 1450s the young King James II often stayed here. After the execution of Protestant reformers in 1545, other reformers retaliated by murdering Cardinal Beaton and taking over the castle. They spent almost a year holed up, during which they dug the siege tunnels.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Murray Pl
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Butts Wynd
North St
North Castle St
Golf Pl
Hope St
Greyfriars Garden
Station Rd
To New Hall (300m)
Kinburn Park
Doubledykes Rd
City Rd
Alexandra Pl
St Mary's Pl
Market St
Church St
College St
Bell St
Holy Trinity Church
Church Sq
South St
South Castle St
Argyle St
Bridge St
Queen's Gardens
West Burn La
Abbey St
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THE SCORES

From the castle, the Scores follows the coast west and down to the first tee at the Old Course. At the west end is the family-friendly **St Andrews Aquarium** (☎ 474786; www.standrewsaquarium.co.uk; adult/child £6.20/4.40; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, call for winter opening), where, bizarrely, you can snack on fish and chips in the café after your visit.

Nearby, the **British Golf Museum** (☎ 460046; www.britishgolfmuseum.co.uk; Bruce Embankment; adult/child £5/2.75; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar; ♿) is an excellent attraction for anyone interested in golf, with a great level of detail about the history and development of the game. Most charming fact: bad players were formerly known as 'foozlers'. There's less about the modern game, but good interactive panels where you can relive former British Opens or watch classic moments like Paul Azinger snapping his putter. Check the website for special offers before visiting.

Opposite the museum is the **Royal & Ancient Golf Club**, which stands proudly at the head of the **Old Course**, which you can stroll on once play is finished for the day. Beside it stretches the magnificent West Sands beach, made famous by the film *Chariots of Fire*.

Sleeping

Accommodation in St Andrews is fairly expensive, due to high property prices, but there's a wide choice, except during summer when things fill up quickly. The biggest concentration of B&Bs is on Murray Park, between North St and the Scores.

BUDGET

St Andrews Tourist Hostel (☎ 479911; www.standrewshostel.com; St Marys Pl; dm £12-15; 💻) This is the only hostel in St Andrews, and it is located mighty conveniently; it's often booked solid. Set in the upstairs floors of an attractive building, it has high corniced ceilings and a spacious feel. Run along extremely easygoing lines, the dorms are good and bright; groups and families can take advantage of the attic room, with five single beds. There's laundry, internet, a good kitchen, and a sociable lounge.

MIDRANGE

Meade B&B (☎ 477350; annmeade10@hotmail.com; 5 Albany Pl; s/d without bathroom £23/45) An economical gem in pricy St Andrews with a warm, unfussy family atmosphere. You'll soon meet the family and pets, especially Fudge, the golden retriever who sits hopefully by the breakfast table. The three rooms share a good bathroom and are all named by their prevailing colour scheme. They are comfortable, airy, and bright, and have books and DVDs to enjoy. Children are more than welcome – and stay cheaper. The location couldn't be better, close to the bus station and Old Course, and with plenty of free parking nearby.

Lorimer House (☎ 476599; www.lorimerhouse.com; 19 Murray Park; per person £26-42; 💻) This Victorian terrace is one of several good B&Bs on this street. The rooms vary significantly; the standard ones are smallish, with dark lacquered fittings; the ones at the front are perhaps best for the large windows they offer. All feel sparkling clean and newly decorated and have especially comfortable beds. The room on the top floor is classified as 'deluxe', and has a great outlook and an excellent bathroom.

Aslar Guest House (☎ 473460; www.aslar.com; 120 North St; s/d £41/82; 💻 wi-fi) A real bastion of St Andrews hospitality, this terraced house has sumptuously elegant rooms. It's exceptional value; computers with free internet have recently been added to all rooms, which had DVD players before most people had heard of them. These modern conveniences do not detract from the house's period features, which include a whimsical turret, which houses one of the rooms. Another room has a lovely four-poster; downstairs is a very comfortable leather lounge area. There's a real feeling of relaxed luxury without fussiness here, so book well ahead!

PLAYING THE OLD COURSE

Golf has been played at St Andrews since the 15th century and by 1457 was apparently so popular that James II had to place a ban on it because it was interfering with his troops' archery practice. Although it lies beside the exclusive, all-male (female bartenders, unsurprisingly, allowed) Royal & Ancient Golf Club, the Old Course is actually public.

Getting a tee-off time is something of a lottery. Unless you book months in advance, the only chance you have of playing here is by entering a ballot at the **caddie office** (☎ 01334-466666) before 2pm on the day before you wish to play. Be warned that applications by ballot are normally heavily oversubscribed, and green fees are £120 in summer. There's no play allowed on Sunday. If your number doesn't come up, there are five other public courses in the area, none with quite the cachet of the Old Course but all of them significantly cheaper. Summer fees are: New £57, Jubilee £57, Eden £34, Strathtyrum £23 and Balgove £10. There are various multiple-day tickets available for these courses. If you play on a windy day expect those scores to balloon: Nick Faldo famously stated that when it blows here, 'even the seagulls walk'.

Advance bookings for the Old Course can be made by phone or online to the **St Andrews Links Trust** (☎ 01334-466666; www.standrews.org.uk). You must reserve after the first Wednesday in September the year before you wish to play. You'll need a handicap certificate (minimum 24/36 for men/women).

The trust runs **guided walks** (£2.50) of the Old Course at weekends in June and daily in July and August; these will take you to famous landmarks such as the Swilcan Bridge and the Road Hole bunker. Times vary according to events on the course.

University of St Andrews Holidays (☎ 462000; www.escapetotranquillity.com; 🕑 mid-Jun–early Sep; Ⓟ) When the university is out of session, three student residences are opened up as visitor accommodation. There's a hotel, New Hall (singles/doubles £46/68); self-catering flats, David Russell Apartments (per week £490 to £590); and a B&B, the central McIntosh Hall (per person £29.50). These prices are all good value for the standard of accommodation on offer.

our pick **Abbey Cottage** (☎ 473727; coull@lineone.net; Abbey Walk; d £52-56; Ⓟ) This is a delightful and engaging spot in which to stay; it feels like you are staying in the country, rather than in town, with eggs from the hens, tasty porridge, and a doocot (dovecote) outside in the rambling garden. There are three excellent rooms, all different, with patchwork quilts, sheepskins, and antique furniture. Best, it's run with relaxed good humour by the fascinating owner, who is a photographer. Stunning shots of noble wild tigers decorate the round breakfast room.

TOP END

Hazelbank Hotel (☎ 472466; www.hazelbank.com; 28 the Scores; s £75, small d £85, d from £111; 💻 wi-fi) Best value of the hotels along the Scores, the Hazelbank is family-run, and a relaxed environment in which to stay. There are good portents if you are playing a round – Bobby Locke stayed here when he won the British Open in 1957. The hotel is characterised by a genuine welcome and very good personal service. The rooms at the front cost a little more but are worth every penny for their sensational views – some through big bay windows – along the beach and out to sea.

Inn on North Street (☎ 473387; www.theinnonnorthstreet.com; 127 North St; s £100, d £120-140; wi-fi) Prices have soared at this cheery hostelry in the last couple of years, but it still represents an intriguing place to stay. The rooms are sun-kissed and spacious, with a lightly-worn Celtic theme. The 'superior' rooms are especially large, and boast large bathrooms with a Jacuzzi. The bar and breakfast area are similarly attractive, with plenty of natural light, and predominantly wood décor There's good bar food, as well as a more serious restaurant. Downstairs, the Lizard Lounge has DJs and occasional ceilidhs.

our pick **Five Pilmour Place** (☎ 478665; www.5pilmourplace.com; 5 Pilmour Pl; r to £143; 💻 wi-fi) Just around the corner from the Old Course, this luxurious and intimate spot marries contemporary European design with Indochinese art and modernised Victoriana. Colourful checked squares pattern freestanding bathtubs, while twin Buddhas contemplate your progress up the stairs. The bedrooms are very luxurious, with modern conveniences – DVD player, flat-screen TV – alongside ultracomfy king-size beds. There are several generous touches that add to the pleasure of a stay: free international calls, for example, free internet, and a professional and friendly welcome. Breakfast is in the gourmet class, and can be eaten in the attractive garden on a good day.

Eating & Drinking

B Jannetta (☎ 473285; 31 South St; 2-scoop cone £1.80; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This is a St Andrews institution, offering 52 varieties of ice cream. These range from the decadent (strawberries-and-champagne) to the weird (Irn-Bru sorbet)! There's also a decent café next door.

Balaka (☎ 474825; 3 Alexandra Pl; mains £5-13; 🕑 noon-3pm & 5pm-12.30am Mon-Thu, noon-1am Fri & Sat, 5pm-12.30am Sun) This Bangladeshi restaurant comes highly recommended for its great-value curries, which are seasoned with herbs grown in its own plot of land. There's a great range of usual favourites and inspiring new discoveries. The service is patient and good-natured. The £6.95 lunch deal is a bargain too.

Grill House (☎ 470500; St Mary's Pl; mains £7-15; 🕑 noon-3pm & 5-10.30pm) This cheerful, sometimes boisterous restaurant is run by the folks at the Doll's House but offers a much different vibe, with a big range of food ranging from Mexican, pizza and pasta to char-grilled salmon and quality steaks. There's something for every taste and wallet; scatty service is compensated for by the upbeat atmosphere and nice touches, such as free margarita and corn chips on arrival.

Doll's House (☎ 477422; 3 Church Sq; mains £12-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Like the bedroom of a Victorian child, with dark-wood furniture and rocking horses, this offers a highly enjoyable lunching or dining experience in the centre of St Andrews. Apart from the atmospheric surroundings and outdoor tables, the food is creative and comfortable, with inventive flair applied to traditional Scottish and European dishes, served in generous portions. The set meals are brilliant value: just £6.95 for a two-course lunch, or £12.95 for dinner before 7pm.

Central Bar (☎ 478296; 77 Market St; 🕑 food 11am-9pm) Right in the heart of things, this pub is also something of an institution, and the island bar is regularly surrounded by a mixture of students, academics, and golfers debating missed putts. There's always a wide range of Scottish beers, including a few guest selections. The food served is fairly standard pub fare, without pretensions to 'gastro' status.

Other recommendations:

West Port (☎ 473186; 170 South St; mains £8-14; 🕑 noon-11pm; wi-fi) Modernised, sleek and handsome, with sophisticated food (served from 6pm to 8pm) and a great beer garden out the back.

Vine Leaf (☎ 477497; 131 South St; 2-course dinner £19.95; 🕑 7-10pm Tue-Sun) Sumptuous seafood, game and vegetarian dishes in a refined, comfortable, and welcoming atmosphere. There's also an attractive self-catering apartment (per day/week £80/350).

Entertainment

Byre Theatre (☎ 475000; www.byretheatre.com; Abbey St) Originally housed in a cowshed, hence the name, St Andrews main theatre now resides in a smart new building that cleverly takes advantage of natural light. As well as the performances, it's got a very pleasant café and bar.

Shopping

Andrew Keracher (☎ 472541; 73 South St) Widely regarded as Scotland's finest fishmonger.

IJ Mellis (☎ 471410; 149 South St) A wealth of cheeses that you can smell halfway down the street.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus destinations include Edinburgh (£7, two hours, hourly), Glasgow (£7, 2½ hours, hourly), Stirling (£6, two hours, six to seven Monday to Saturday), Dundee (£3.10, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

The nearest train station to St Andrews is Leuchars, 5 miles away. There are services to Edinburgh (£9.70, one hour, hourly), Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness. Buses connect the station with St Andrews bus station frequently.

Getting Around

To park in the centre of town you need a voucher, bought from the tourist office or many shops in town. Parking police are vigilant.

A taxi from the train station at Leuchars to the town centre costs around £10 with **Golf City Taxis** (☎ 477788).

Spokes (☎ 477835; 37 South St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) hires out hybrids and mountain bikes from £10.50 per day or £3 per hour.

AROUND ST ANDREWS

Also see East Neuk, below, for attractions in the St Andrews area.

Kellie Castle

A magnificent example of Lowland Scottish domestic architecture, **Kellie Castle** (NTS: ☎ 01333-720271; adult/child £8/5; 🕑 1-5pm Easter weekend & May-Sep, garden & grounds 9.30am-5.30pm year-round) has creaky floors, crooked little doorways and some marvellous works of art, which give it an air of authenticity. It's set in a beautiful garden and many rooms contain superb plasterwork; the Vine room is the most exquisite. The original part of the building dates from 1360 and was enlarged to its present dimensions around 1606.

It's 3 miles northwest of Pittenweem on the B9171. Stagecoach Fife bus 95 from St Andrews gets you closest; about 1.5 miles away.

Scotland's Secret Bunker

A compelling and fascinating relic of the Cold War, **Scotland's Secret Bunker** (☎ 01333-310301; www.secretbunker.co.uk; adult/child £7.80/4.80; 🕑 10am-6pm late Mar-Oct, last admission 5pm) is by the B9131 about 5 miles south of St Andrews. It was earmarked to be one of Britain's underground command and control centres and a home for Scots leaders in the event of nuclear war. Hidden 30m underground and surrounded by reinforced concrete are the austere operation rooms, communication centre and dormitories. It's very authentic and uses original artefacts of the period, which make for an absorbing exploration.

If the spine-tingling atmosphere isn't enough, a harrowing film called *The War Game,* which was banned by the BBC, gives a horrifying account of the realities of a nuclear war. It's graphic and definitely not for kids, but highlights the madness of the era. There's also an underground café and free internet access.

There's no easy bus access, but a cab from St Andrews will cost about £12.

EAST NEUK

☎ 01333

South of St Andrews, the section of the southern Fife coast that stretches from Leven east to the point at Fife Ness is known as East Neuk. There are picturesque fishing villages, some great restaurants, and good coastal walks in the area. It's easily visited from St Andrews, but also makes a peaceful area to stay.

Crail

pop 1700

Pretty and peaceful, little Crail has a much photographed harbour surrounded by stone cottages with red-tiled roofs. You can buy lobster and crabs from a kiosk at the harbour; just to the east is a large grassed area with seating, the perfect place to munch on your alfresco crustacean meal while admiring the view across to the Isle of May.

See the small and friendly **tourist office** (☎ 450869; crail@visitfife.com; 62 Marketgait; 🕑 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, weekends only Apr-May) for information. The village's history and involvement with the fishing industry is outlined in the **Crail Museum** (admission free), in the same building and keeping the same hours.

Caiplie House (☎ 450564; www.caipliehouse.com; 53 High St North; r £55-60; 🕑 Apr-Oct), in the centre of town, a block west of the crossroads, has large rooms with lots of lights, and big soft beds perfect for flopping down after a day's touring, walking, or golfing; a lounge with chessboard; and a pretty dining room where breakfast is served: dinners can also be arranged. An extra couple of quid buys the top room, which has fantastic views across to the East Lothian coast.

Crail is located 10 miles southeast of St Andrews. Stagecoach bus 95 connects them hourly.

Anstruther

pop 3440

Once one of Scotland's busiest ports, cheery Anstruther has ridden the tribulations of the Scottish fishing industry better than some, and now has a very pleasant mixture of bobbing boats, historic streets, and visitors ambling around the harbour grazing on fish and chips or contemplating a trip across to the Isle of May.

The **tourist office** (☎ 311073; anstruther@visitfife.com; Harbourhead; 🕑 Apr–mid-Oct) is by the harbour and is extremely helpful and efficient. In the same building, is the down-to-earth **Scottish Fisheries Museum** (☎ 310628; adult/child £4.50/free; 🕑 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat & noon-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep; ♿), beside the tourist office. Displays include a typical fishing family's cottage and the history of Anstruther's once-important herring and whaling industries.

From the harbour you can take a four- to five-hour excursion aboard the **May Princess** (☎ 310103; www.isleofmayferry.com; adult/child £16/8; 🕑 one almost daily Apr-Sep) to the **Isle of May**, a nature reserve; sailing times depend on the tide (phone or check the website) and the crossing takes just under an hour. The cliffs are packed with breeding kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots, shags and puffins from May to July. Inland are the remains of 12th-century **St Adrian's Chapel**.

SLEEPING & EATING

our pick **Spindrift** (☎ 310573; www.thespindrift.co.uk; Pittenweem Rd; s/d £45/65; P wi-fi) A refuge of good taste and warm hospitality, this excellent guesthouse is one of the best-value spots to stay in Fife. The en-suite rooms (with teddy bears) are exceptionally attractive and comfortable; you can see across to Edinburgh from some of them. For something different, try the room which the old salt who once owned the house did out like a ship's cabin. Downstairs, the bar-lounge has malts and distinctive Scottish ales; the breakfast is generous, and includes porridge which has been voted the best in the Kingdom. Dinner also by arrangement.

Anstruther Fish Bar (☎ 310518; 42 Shore St; 🕑 11.30am-10pm) Reputedly one of Prince William's favourite destinations while studying at St Andrews, this waterside place does tasty and famous fish and chips to eat in or, better, sit outside with. It's mobbed in summer. Haddock and chips to take away is £4.35; to eat in is £6.35.

Dreel Tavern (☎ 310727; 16 High St; bar meals £5-11; 🕑 food noon-2pm & 5.30-9pm) This atmospheric traditional pub appeals for its low ceilings and bright and breezy staff. There's a beer garden, appetising food served and several real ales on tap, including the brilliantly named 'Bitter and Twisted', a Stirlingshire-brewed beer bristling with fresh hoppy flavour.

Cellar Restaurant (☎ 310378; 24 East Green; lunch £17.50, 2-/3-/4-course dinner £28.50/34.50/38.50; 🕑 lunch Wed-Sat, 7-9pm Tue-Sat) Tucked away behind the museum, this convivial spot is famous for its variety of seafood. It's heavily booked in summer; if you get a table, adorn it with local crab, lobster, or the excellent marinated herring.

Seafood Restaurant (☎ 730327; 16 West End, St Monans; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This swish seafood restaurant is on the harbour at St Monans, 4 miles west. It's an enchanting and relaxing place to eat, with delicious fish dishes; the Dover sole is a star. There's another attractive branch in St Andrews.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The hourly Stagecoach bus 95 runs hourly from Leven (45 minutes) to Anstruther and on to St Andrews (35 minutes) via Crail.

FALKLAND

☎ 01337 / pop 1180

Below the soft ridges of the Lomond Hills in the centre of Fife is the charming village of Falkland. It essentially developed around its magnificent centrepiece, the 16th-century **Falkland Palace** (NTS; ☎ 857397; adult/child £10/7; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun Mar-Oct), a country residence of the Stuart monarchs. Mary Queen of Scots is said to have spent the happiest days of her life 'playing the country girl in the woods and parks' at Falkland.

The palace is visually stunning, a masterpiece of Scottish Gothic, and with much French influence evident in the decoration and furnishings. There are several fine portraits of the Stuart monarchs, and various chambers have been reconstructed, although much of the original castle was gutted by Cromwell's troops. The highlight is the beautiful chapel with heraldic windows, an ornate painted ceiling, and elegant oak screen. Outside in the ample gardens, one feature of an ancient royal leisure-centre still exists: the oldest royal tennis court in Britain, built in 1539 for James V, is in the grounds and still in use.

Sleeping & Eating

Burgh Lodge (☎ 857710; www.burghlodge.co.uk; Back Wynd; dm/tw £12/24; 🅿 🖥 ♿) An excellent budget choice, this sparklingly refurbished hostel has terrific views of the Lomond Hills and enthusiastic management. The rooms are bright as a new pin; there are dorm beds as well as twin and family rooms available. Guests have use of a modern kitchen and laundry service; this is seriously comfortable hostelling. Great disabled facilities. Often booked out by groups.

Covenanter Hotel (☎ 857224; High St; www.covenanterhotel.com; s/d £45/70) Opposite the church, this characterful old coaching inn is a decent enough place to stay. There are just three rooms which are large and somewhat faded, but comfortable. More inspiringly, downstairs is a smart new Italian restaurant: Luigino's (mains £8 to £12; open for lunch and dinner) serves authentic and tasty dishes such as saltimbocca, as well as delicious wood-fired pizza accompanied by a good range of Italian wines. All served in a cheerful and stylish atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus 36 travels between Glenrothes and Auchtermuchty via Falkland. From either of those two places, there are regular connections to St Andrews and other Fife destinations. It carries on to Perth (one hour) every couple of hours.

SOUTHWESTERN FIFE

☎ 01383

Southwestern Fife is an odd mixture of rapidly expanding urban sprawl (Fife's proximity to expensive Edinburgh has made it part of the commuter belt) and quiet country lanes. There are several worthwhile attractions here, all easily visited on a day trip from the capital.

Aberdour

This little town is notable chiefly for the attractive ruins of **Aberdour Castle** (HS; ☎ 860519; adult/child £3.50/1.50; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar). Long a residence of the Douglases of Morton, the stately structure exhibits several architectural phases. It's worth purchasing the guidebook to better comprehend what you see. Most charming of all is the elaborate doocot at the bottom of the garden. Be sure to pop into the beautiful Romanesque church of St Fillan's, next door to the castle.

Aberdour is 5 miles east of the Forth Rd Bridge on the A921. Stagecoach bus 7 regularly connects Aberdour with nearby Dunfermline, and there are regular trains to Edinburgh (30 minutes) and Dundee (one hour).

Dunfermline

Sprawling Dunfermline is an important regional centre and the major town in Fife but appeals more as a day trip from Edinburgh, Stirling, or St Andrews than as a place to stay. However, it has an excellent historical attraction. **Dunfermline Abbey** (HS; ☎ 739026; admission £3; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Thu, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) was built by David I in the 12th century as a Benedictine monastery. It grew into a major religious centre, eclipsing the island of Iona (off Mull) as the favourite royal burial ground. Many monarchs are buried here, including Robert the Bruce, under the pulpit. The area you can explore is the wonderful Norman nave with ornate columns and superb stained-glass windows. Note the picture of Robert the Bruce standing over the devil (England, perhaps?).

Next to the abbey are the ruins of **Dunfermline Palace** (admission included in abbey ticket) rebuilt from the abbey guesthouse in the 16th century for James VI, whose son, the ill-fated Charles I, was born here in 1600.

There are frequent buses to Edinburgh (40 minutes), Stirling (1¼ hours) and St Andrews (1¼ hours). There are also regular trains from Edinburgh (30 minutes).

ROSYTH FERRIES

Rosyth, 3 miles south of Dunfermline, is home to a ferry-link with Belgium. From Edinburgh, Stagecoach bus X2 runs to Rosyth (35 minutes) and connects with the ferries. There are frequent local services from Dunfermline, and buses to the train station at nearby Inverkeithing connect with rail services to Edinburgh, Perth and Inverness.

Culross

Enchanting Culross (coo-*ross*) is the best-preserved example of a 17th-century Scottish burgh. Small, red-tiled, whitewashed buildings line the cobbled streets, and the winding Back Causeway to the abbey is embellished with whimsical street-front stone cottages.

As the birthplace of St Mungo, Glasgow's patron saint, Culross was an important religious centre from the 6th century. The burgh developed by mining coal through underwater tunnels, under the laird George Bruce; vigorous trade resulted between Culross and the Forth ports and Holland, enabling Bruce to build and complete the palace by 1611. When a storm flooded the tunnels and mining became impossible the town switched to making linen and shoes.

You can visit **Culross Palace** (NTS; ☎ 880359; adult/child £8/5; 🕑 noon-5pm Easter-Sep), more a large house than a palace, which features decorative, painted woodwork and an interior largely unchanged since the early 17th century, as well as a re-created formal garden from the era. The **Town House** and the **Study** (admission included in the palace ticket), also early-17th-century buildings, are also open to the public.

On the hill is the grand, ruined **Culross Abbey** (HS; admission free; 🕑 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 2-7pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Mar), founded by the Cistercians in 1217.

Culross is 12 miles west of the Forth Rd Bridge, off the A985. Stagecoach bus 78/78A runs to Culross from Dunfermline (20 minutes, hourly), with some services going to Stirling (one hour, every two hours).

PERTHSHIRE & KINROSS

A 19th-century competitor to this guidebook suggested 'Among all the provinces in Scotland, if an intelligent stranger were asked to describe the most varied and the most beautiful, it is probable he would name the county of Perth'. Nothing has changed, for the joys of Perthshire are many, and the region has a magical quality.

It's an area of huge scenic variety, from the bleak expanse of Rannoch Moor in the west to the rich forested valleys and lakes further east. The main town, Perth, is an excellent little place, quiet, but with an outstanding attraction in the lavish country mansion that is Scone Palace. Further north, another sumptuous residence, Blair Castle, stands near the touristy town of Pitlochry.

It's more remote western Perthshire that really gets pulses racing, though. The enchanting valley of Glen Lyon can strike visitors dumb with its wild and remote beauty. Stunning Loch Tay, base for ascending Ben Lawers, is nearby; the River Tay runs east from here towards Dunkeld, which has an outstanding cathedral that is among the most beautifully situated in the country.

Getting Around

The A9, Scotland's busiest road, cuts across the centre of this region through Perth and Pitlochry. It's the fast route into the Highlands and to Inverness, and very busy.

Perth & Kinross Council produce a useful public transport map that's available at all tourist offices in the area; it shows all services in the region. **Stagecoach** (☎ 01738-629339; www.stagecoachbus.com) and **Strathtay Scottish** (☎ 01382-228345) run local services.

Trains run alongside the A9, destined for Aviemore and Inverness. The other main line connects Perth with Stirling (in the south) and Dundee and Arbroath (in the east).

PERTH

☎ 01738 / pop 43,500 / elev 22m

Perth is a grand little town elegantly perched on the banks of the Tay. Once the country's capital, it's of a very manageable size, and is a delightful place to wander. On the outskirts, Scone Palace, a country house of staggering luxury, is built alongside the mound where Scotland's kings were once crowned. It's a must-see, but the city itself is a bustling, liveable place enriched by stately architecture, fine galleries, and some excellent restaurants. On a sunny day it's hard to top a picnic in one of the two large, verdant parks that sandwich the centre of town. It's an important regional hub and is within easy striking distance of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Information

AK Bell Library (☎ 444949; York Pl; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Free internet access.

Gig@Bytes (☎ 451580; 5 St Paul's Sq; per hr £5; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Friendly, if pricy, internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 450600; West Mill St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat Nov-Mar) Maps of Perth and well-prepared information sheets.

Sights

SCONE PALACE

> So thanks to all at once and to each one,
> Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.
>
> *Macbeth*

Fabulous **Scone Palace** (☎ 552300; www.scone-palace.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/4.50; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, call for winter opening; ♿), pronounced skoon, is 2 miles north of Perth. It was built in 1580 on a site intrinsic to Scottish history. Here in 838, Kenneth MacAlpin became the first king of a united Scotland and brought the Stone of Destiny (see p757), on which all Scottish kings were ceremonially invested, to Moot Hill. In 1296 Edward I of England carted the talisman off to Westminster Abbey, where it remained for 700 years before being returned to Scotland.

A visit here doesn't really conjure up hoary days of bearded warrior kings swearing oaths in the mist, however, as Scone, rebuilt as a Georgian palace in the early 19th century, is a mansion of extreme elegance and luxury.

The visit takes you through a succession of sumptuous rooms filled with fine French furniture and noble artworks. There's an astonishing collection of porcelain and fine portraits, as well as a series of exquisite Vernis Martin papier maché. Scone Palace has belonged for centuries to the Murray family, Earls of Mansfield, and many of the objects have fascinating history attached to them (friendly guides are on hand). Each room has comprehensive multilingual information; there are also panels relating histories of some of the Scottish kings crowned at Scone over the centuries.

Outside, the resident peacocks – all named after a monarch – strut around the magnificent grounds, which incorporate woods, a butterfly garden, and a maze.

The ancient kings were crowned atop Moot Hill, topped by a chapel, next to the palace. It's said that the hill was created by bootfuls of earth, brought by nobles attending the coronations as an acknowledgement of the king's rights over their own lands, although it's probably the site of an ancient motte-and-bailey castle.

From the centre of Perth, cross the bridge, turn left, and keep bearing left until you reach the gates of the estate (15 to 20 minutes). From here, it's another half-mile or so to the palace. Stagecoach bus 3, and Strathtay bus 58 stop at the gates roughly hourly; the tourist office will give you a complete timetable. There's a good café at the palace.

FERGUSSON GALLERY

Within the original Perth waterworks building, aptly titled the Round House, this **gallery** (☎ 441944; cnr Marshall Pl & Tay St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ♿) has the most extensive collection of work by Scottish colourist JD Fergusson, one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century. He spent much time in Paris, and the French influence is evident in this fine assemblage of paintings, drawings, and sculpture.

ST JOHN'S KIRK

One block south of High St, this redoubtable stone **church** (St John's Pl; requested donation £1; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun May-Sep, before services rest of year) dates from the 15th century, although the site was first consecrated in 1126 and serves as an impressive reminder of the Reformation in Scotland. In 1559 John Knox preached a powerful sermon here, inciting a frenzied destruction of Scone abbey and other religious sites. Perth used to be known as St John's Town after this church; the football team here is still called St Johnstone.

PERTH MUSEUM

The city's main **museum** (☎ 632488; cnr George & Charlotte Sts; admission free; 🕒 Mon-Sat 10am-5pm; ♿) is worth a stroll through for the elegant neoclassical interior alone. There's a varied shower of exhibits, ranging from portraits of dour lairds to good local social history. A geological room provides more entertainment for the young, while there are often excellent temporary exhibitions.

BLACK WATCH MUSEUM

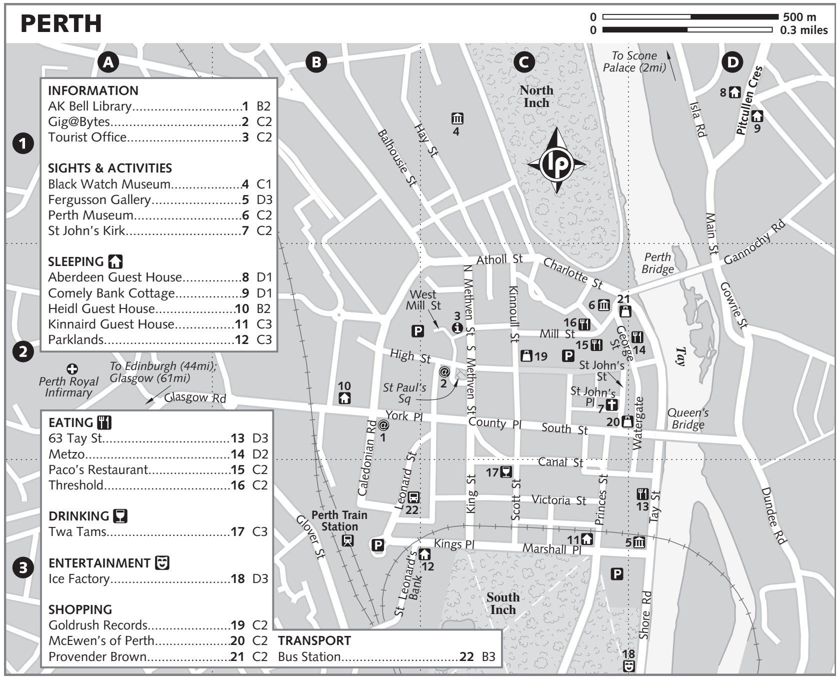
Housed in a mansion on the edge of North Inch, this **museum** (☎ 0131 310 8530; Hay St; recommended donation £3.50; 🕒 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) honours what was once Scotland's foremost regiment. Formed in 1725 to combat rural banditry, the Black Watch have fought in numerous campaigns, re-created here with paintings, memorabilia, anecdotes, and countless medals. There's little attempt at historical perspective: there's justifiable pride in the regiment's role in the gruelling trench warfare of WWI, where it suffered nearly 30,000 casualties, but no hint of sheepishness about less glorious colonial engagements, such as against the 'Fuzzy Wuzzies' of Sudan. These days they sport combat trousers instead of the traditional kilts. In March 2006 the five Scottish regiments were subsumed as battalions in the new Royal Regiment of Scotland, so the Black Watch, as a separate regiment at least, is no more.

Sleeping

There is currently no hostel accommodation in Perth.

Heidl Guest House (☎ 635031; www.heidl.co.uk; 43 York Pl; s/d £23/46; **P**) The Heidl has much better rooms than you'd expect at first glance. They're light and have good-sized beds, and even the one facing the busy road isn't too noisy. Shared bathrooms (some rooms come with good, modern en suite) are very clean and the owners are helpful. Writer John Buchan (of *Thirty-Nine Steps* fame) was born in the house opposite.

Comely Bank Cottage (☎ 631118; www.comelybankcottage.co.uk; 19 Pitcullen Cres; s/d £30/48; **P**) This is one of the best B&Bs on this stretch, a beautifully kept family home offering large and commodious rooms with spacious en suite. The hospitable owner will make you feel very welcome.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West Mill St
N Methven St
S Methven St
Kinnoull St
Mill St
George St
High St
St John's St
St John's Pl
St Paul's Sq
York Pl
County Pl
South St
Canal St
Caledonian Rd
Leonard St
King St
Scott St
Victoria St
Princes St
Watergate
Tay St
Kings Pl
Marshall Pl
St Leonard's Bank
Glover St
Perth Train Station
Shore Rd
Perth Bridge
Queen's Bridge
Tay
Isla Rd
Pitcullen Cres
Main St
Gannochy Rd
Gowrie St
Dundee Rd
P

Kinnaird Guest House (☎ 628021; www.kinnaird-guesthouse.co.uk; 5 Marshall Pl; s/d £35/55; P wi-fi) This is the best of the handful of guesthouses enjoying a privileged position across the road from the lovely South Inch parkland. The elegant old house has noble original features and boasts appealing, bright rooms with big beds. The owners are engaging and extremely helpful; they are justifiably proud of what Perth has to offer.

Aberdeen Guest House (☎ 633183; peterbuchan@fsmail.net; 13 Pitcullen Cres; d £50-60; P) A real pleasure to stay at, the Aberdeen is run by an enthusiastic, ebullient couple who will really make you feel at home. Not averse to strapping on a backpack themselves, they know what a weary traveller is after, with great, comfortable beds, Horlicks on the tea tray, rooms overlooking a beautiful garden, and plenty of friendly conversation.

our pick **Parklands** (☎ 622451; www.theparklandshotel.com; 2 St Leonard's Bank; s/d from £79/99; P 💻 wi-fi) This is a delightful, secluded place overlooking the verdant expanse of South Inch. While the rooms conserve the character of this beautiful building, formerly the residence of the town's mayors, they also offer modern conveniences such as CD and DVD players and wireless broadband internet. The rooms are all different in size and price, but all offer a high degree of comfort. The restaurant has a fine reputation and a terrace to lap up the Perthshire sun.

Eating

Threshold (☎ 0845-612 6324; Mill St; dishes £7-10; 🕒 food 10am-6pm) In the foyer of the spanking new Perth Concert Hall, this open-plan eatery has plenty to offer. The range of light daytime dishes includes several healthy and vegetarian choices – an asparagus and pea risotto stood out – as well as sandwiches and fresh juices.

Paco's Restaurant (☎ 622290; 3 Mill St; mains £7-19; 🕒 9.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 4.30pm-11pm Sun) A well-loved local eating spot, Paco's is popular for its fountain-tinkled outdoor seating and huge, wide-ranging menu. Whatever you fancy, you'll probably find it here – steaks, seafood, pizza, pasta and Mexican all feature, including plenty of vegetarian choice. The portions are generous and the quality unspectacular but reliable.

Metzo (☎ 626016; 33 George St; mains £10-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; ♿) This is a zippy modern eatery whose light contemporary interior – shaved floorboards, abstract art, and large windows – buzzes with chatter. There's substance to the style; enticing daily specials enhance a French bistro–style menu bursting with confident flavours and served with effortless charm.

our pick **63 Tay Street** (☎ 441451; 63 Tay St; lunch £12.95, 3-course dinner £25.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This classy, understated place has steadily built a great reputation for its attractive, light, dining area, excellent service and quality food. There's always an extremely tempting range of fish, game, beef and vegetarian dishes with an emphasis on quality Scottish produce.

Drinking

Twa Tams (☎ 634500; 79 Scott St) Comfortably Perth's best pub. There's something on nearly every night; it has a sound reputation for attracting talented young bands to town, and is a great spot to see live music. There's also, crucially, a walled beer garden. At the time of writing, it was being refurbished – don't ruin it please!

Entertainment

Ice Factory (☎ 630011; www.icefactory.co.uk; Shore Rd; cover £5-10; 🕒 11pm-2.30am Thu-Sat) Widely known as one of Scotland's best nightclubs outside of Glasgow and Edinburgh, this is near the harbour in the south of town. Built around an open courtyard, high-jinks in the paddling pool and foam parties are regular favourites. High-profile Scottish house DJs often appear and, true to its name, it's a pretty cool place.

Shopping

McEwen's of Perth (☎ 623444; 56 St John's St) This venerable old department store is famous throughout Scotland and sells distinguished and upmarket clothing.

Goldrush Records (☎ 629730; 9 Kinnoull St) A down-to-earth spot that has a well-priced range of secondhand and new CDs, as well as some vinyl.

Provender Brown (☎ 587300; 23 George St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Fabulous deli, with great cheeses, pâtés, and wines.

Getting There & Away

Citylink operates one or two buses every hour to/from Aberdeen (£14.59, 2½ hours); Dundee (35 minutes); Edinburgh (£6.80, 1¼ hours); Glasgow (£7, 1½ hours); and Inverness (£12.20, 2½ hours, at least three daily).

Trains run to Edinburgh (£11.10, 1½ hours, two hourly) and Glasgow (Queen St; £11.10, one hour, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday).

PERTH TO AVIEMORE

There are several major sights strung out along the busy A9, which becomes a scenic treat after Pitlochry – it's the main route north to Aviemore and the Highlands.

Dunkeld & Birnam

☎ 01350 / pop 1000 / elev 78m

Dunkeld is an appealing riverside town with quirky shops, some great nearby walks and one of the best attractions in the region.

The smiling staff at **Dunkeld tourist office** (☎ 727688; The Cross; 🕒 daily Apr-Oct, Fri-Tue Nov-Mar) offer plenty of information.

Dunkeld Cathedral (HS; ☎ 727601; High St; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Oct-Mar; ♿) has one of Scotland's most beautiful settings, situated between open grassland which drops into the River Tay on one side, and rolling hills on the other. Half the cathedral is still in use as a church – the rest is in ruins. It partly dates from the 14th century; the 15th-century tower contains a small museum. The cathedral was damaged during the Reformation and burnt in the battle of Dunkeld in 1689. The Wolf of Badenoch (see p868) is buried – undeservedly – here.

A collection of **artisans' houses** restored by National Trust Scotland (NTS) line High and Cathedral Sts; most have plaques with a brief history of their origins. Across Telford Bridge is **Birnam**, made famous by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. There's plenty left of Birnam Wood, which has several walking and cycling trails detailed by the tourist office; there's also a small **Beatrix Potter Park** (the author spent childhood holidays in the area).

A fine spot for a pub lunch on a sunny day is a riverside table at the character-packed **Taybank** (☎ 727340; www.thetaybank.com; Tay Tce; bar mains £5-8; P), a music-focused pub which does pasta, baguettes, bar food and more elaborate restaurant meals; it also has decent rooms (singles/doubles £28/45) upstairs.

Citylink buses from Glasgow/Edinburgh (£9.30, two hours, at least three daily) to Inverness stop at the Birnam House Hotel. Frequent Stagecoach buses head to Perth (20 minutes) and Pitlochry (20 minutes, Monday to Saturday).

Trains depart for Edinburgh (£11.10, 1½ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday), Glasgow (£11.10, 1½ hours, two direct daily), and Inverness (£18.70, two hours, three to seven daily).

Pitlochry

☎ 01796 / pop 2564 / elev 147m

While it's a peaceful Highland town out of season, the quantity of tour buses and other holiday traffic choking the main street in summer can really diminish Pitlochry's appeal. However, it's very well situated for exploring northern Perthshire, and has one of Scotland's best pubs in the hills behind the town.

The efficient **tourist office** (☎ 472215; 22 Atholl Rd; 🕒 daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) has information about the area. **Computer Services Centre** (☎ 473711; 67 Atholl Rd; per hr £3; 🕒 Mon-Sat) has internet connections upstairs.

One of Pitlochry's attractions is its riverside; the Tummel is dammed here, and you can watch salmon swimming (not jumping) up a fish ladder to the loch above.

Pitlochry has a couple of distilleries; by far the nicer is pretty **Edradour** (☎ 472095; www.edradour.co.uk; tours free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jan & Feb, 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun Nov & Dec), proudly Scotland's smallest distillery. It's 2.5 miles east of Pitlochry along the Moulin road, and a pleasant walk there.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are dozens of hotels and guesthouses in Pitlochry; the tourist office can help with finding a bed.

Pitlochry Backpackers Hotel (☎ 470044; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 134 Atholl Rd; dm/tw £14/28; 🕒 Mar-Oct; P 💻) This excellent, sociable hostel is in a pretty old building in the heart of things. The dorms are comfortable enough, and there are great-value twins (beds not bunks), with shared bathroom as well as an en-suite double. Breakfast, laundry, and bike hire are all available.

Tir Aluinn Guest House (☎ 473811; www.tiraluinn.co.uk; 10 Higher Oakfield; s/d £25/50; P) This small spot tucked away above the main street is a gem of a place, with a big welcome and neat, comfortable rooms. One is suitable for a family; and there's a pretty garden.

our pick **Moulin Hotel** (☎ 472196; www.moulinhotel.co.uk; Moulin; bar mains £6-10; 🕒 food 11am-9.30pm) A mile away but a world apart, this atmospheric little inn was trading centuries before the tartan tack came to Pitlochry. With its romantic low ceilings, ageing wood and booth seating, it's a great spot to escape the crowds for a drink and a meal. The Highland comfort food is excellent, particularly the haggis, or the venison stew, and you can accompany it with the hotel's home-brewed ales. A more formal restaurant serves equally delicious fare. There's a variety of very appealing rooms (£70 to £85) too. The best way to get here from Pitlochry is to walk: it's a pretty uphill stroll through green fields, and an easy roll down the hill afterwards.

Port-Na-Craig Inn (☎ 472777; Port Na Craig; mains £8-17; 🕒 11am-11pm) By the River Tummel just below the Festival Theatre, this is a great little spot in what was once a separate village. Accompanied by the tinkling of the water and the whisk of the odd angler's rod, you can enjoy anything from simple pasta or cottage pie to more elaborate creations with venison or tuna, or just relax with a drink at the picnic-style tables outside.

Other places to stay:

Pitlochry SYHA Hostel (☎ 472308; www.syha.org.uk; Knockard Rd; dm £13.50; 🕒 Mar-Oct; Ⓟ 💻) Overlooks the town centre and has great views.

Atholl Villa (☎ 473820; www.athollvilla.co.uk; 29 Atholl Rd; r per person £22-35; Ⓟ ♿) Appeals with its large lawn and flowery garden. No children.

Derrybeg Guest House (☎ 472070; www.derrybeg.co.uk; 18 Lower Oakfield; r per person to £32; Ⓟ) Set in two adjacent stone buildings with a large garden. Great dinner available.

Knockendarroch Hotel (☎ 473473; www.knockendarroch.co.uk; Higher Oakfield; d B&B with dinner to £156; 🕒 Feb-Nov; Ⓟ) Romantic, lavish Highland hospitality; classy but small and friendly, with dinners fit for Pavarotti.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses operated by Citylink run roughly every hour and connect Pitlochry to Inverness (£9.60, two hours), Perth (40 minutes), Edinburgh (£9.40, two hours) and Glasgow (£9.40, 2¼ hours).

Pitlochry is on the main rail line from Perth (30 minutes, nine daily Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) to Inverness.

Blair Castle

Noble **Blair Castle** (☎ 01796-481207; www.blair-castle.co.uk; adult/child £7.20/4.50; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, last admission 4.30pm, call for winter opening) and the 108 sq miles it sits on, is the seat of the Duke of Atholl. It's an impressive white building set beneath forested slopes above the River Garry.

The original tower was built in 1269, but the castle has undergone significant remodelling since then. Thirty rooms are open to the public and they present a wonderful picture of upper-class Highland life from the 16th century to the late 20th century. The dining room is sumptuous – check out the 9-pint wine glasses – and the ballroom is a vaulted chamber that's a virtual stag cemetery.

The current duke is a distant relative (in every sense of the word – he lives in South Africa) to the 10th duke, who died a bachelor in 1996. He visits the castle every May to review the Atholl Highlanders, Britain's only private army.

Blair Castle is 7 miles north of Pitlochry, and a mile from the village of **Blair Atholl**. Local buses run to Blair Atholl four to six times daily, and a couple go direct to the castle. There's a train station but few trains stop here.

WEST PERTHSHIRE

This remote area of Perthshire is a real jewel in Scotland's crown, with fabulous hills and lochs the equal of any Highland scenery. It's difficult to reach via public transport – some buses are once-a-day postal services – but for just that reason has an appeal that lives long in the memory.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 01887-820276; The Sq; 🕒 daily mid-Apr–Oct, Mon-Sat Nov–mid-Apr) in the village of **Aberfeldy**, the gateway to the region, and one in Killin. Stagecoach runs buses to Aberfeldy from Perth (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) and from Pitlochry (45 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

Loch Tay & Kenmore

☎ 01887 / elev 476m

Long, beautiful Loch Tay reflects the powerful forests and mountains around it. The bulk of mighty **Ben Lawers** (1214m) looms above and is part of a National Nature Reserve that includes the nearby Tarmachan range. The **Ben Lawers visitors centre** (☎ 01567-820397; admission £1; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep), which sells the *Ben Lawers Nature Trail* booklet, describing the area's flora and fauna, is 5 miles east of Killin, a mile off the A827.

Pretty **Kenmore** lies at the eastern end of Loch Tay, and is dominated by a church and clock tower and the striking archway of the privately owned **Taymouth Castle**. Just outside town, on the loch, is the cracking **Scottish Crannog Centre** (☎ 830583; www.crannog.co.uk; guided tour £4.95; 🕒 10am-5.30pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov). A crannog, perched on stilts in the water, was the favoured form of defence-minded dwelling in Scotland from the 3rd millennium BC onwards. This one has been superbly reconstructed, and the guided tour (last tour one hour before closing) includes an impressive demonstration of firemaking. It's a fascinating, informative place to visit.

our pick **Kenmore Hotel** (☎ 830205, www.kenmorehotel.com; s/d £67/104; Ⓟ ♿) is another good reason to stop here. It's a historic inn (founded 1572) and has a lovely beer garden by the riverbank. In the bar, cosy with its roaring fire, look out for the verses written on the chimney piece by Robert Burns in 1787. The rooms, many of which have bay windows overlooking the River Tay, have been modernised without losing their character.

Loch Tay is a great spot for cycling; you can hire bikes at **Perthshire Mountain Bikes** (☎ 830291; 31 Taymouth Dr), which has a leaflet detailing local routes.

There are regular buses from Aberfeldy to Kenmore (20 minutes).

At the western end of Loch Tay, but just out of Perthshire, Killin (p845) is another good base.

Fortingall

West of Aberfeldy, the pretty village of Fortingall is at the turn-off to Glen Lyon. Tranquil and picturesque, it has 19th-century thatched cottages, and is famous, curiously, as the possible birthplace of Pontius Pilate, and for its ancient yew tree.

Fortingall Hotel (☎ 830367; www.fortingallhotel.com; s/d from £69/99; 🕒 Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) is a place to come for a bit of solitude or walking. Part of the hotel dates from 1300; it's just been completely made over, but hasn't lost its remote, hospitable character. The rooms look out over the green meadows and have great beds and proper modern bathrooms. There's a good restaurant here (mains £9 to £15), for guests only.

Glen Lyon

This remote and stunningly beautiful glen runs for some 34 unforgettable miles of rickety stone bridges, Caledonian pine forest and sheer peaks (splashed with red and orange heather) poking through swirling clouds. It becomes wilder and more uninhabited as it snakes its way west and is proof that hidden treasures still exist in Scotland. The ancients believed it to be a gateway to faerie land, and even the most sceptical of people will be entranced by the valley's magic.

From Fortingall, a narrow road winds its way up the glen – another road from the Ben Lawers visitors centre crosses the hills and reaches the glen halfway in, at Bridge of Balgie. The glen continues up to a dam (look out for the memorial to explorer Robert Campbell); bearing left here you can actually continue, with a sturdy car, to remote Glen Lochay and on to Killin. Cycling through Glen Lyon is a wonderful way to experience this special place.

There's little in the way of attractions in the valley – the majestic and lonely scenery is the reason to be here, but at **Glenlyon Arts & Crafts**, next to the post office (which does more-than-decent lunches) at Bridge of Balgie, a selection of fine handmade pieces are on sale.

our pick **Milton Eonan** (☎ 01887-866318; www.miltoneonan.com; Bridge of Balgie; s/d £35/70, dm £15; Ⓟ) is a working croft on the site of a 7th century watermill. The setting is fabulous, and the young, lively owners live surrounded by an amazing menagerie of animals. As well as B&B in comfortable rooms, they offer excellent three-course evening meals (£15) and can prepare packed lunches. Another cottage on the croft has been converted to a bunkhouse. After crossing the bridge at Bridge of Balgie, you'll see Milton Eonan signposted to the right.

BEN LAWERS – A CLASSIC ROUTE

The trek up Ben Lawers starts at the visitors centre and is one of the best walks in the area. The trip to the top and back can take up to five hours and you need wet weather gear, water and food. Take the nature trail that heads northeast. After the boardwalk protecting a bog, cross a stile, then fork left and ascend along a burn (to the right). At the next rise, fork right and cross the burn. A few minutes' later ignore the nature trail's right turn and continue ascending parallel to the burn's left bank for just over half a mile. Leave the protected zone by another stile and steeply ascend Beinn Ghlas' shoulder. Reaching a couple of large rocks, ignore a northbound footpath and continue zigzagging uphill. The rest of the ascent is a straightforward succession of three false summits. The last and steepest section alternates between erosion-sculpted rock and a meticulously crafted cobbled trail. Views of the North Sea, and Atlantic, are outstanding on a clear day.

The only public transport in the glen is postbus 211, which leaves Aberfeldy at 9am, Monday to Saturday, returning from Glen Lyon post office at 1.25pm.

ABERDEENSHIRE & MORAY

This part of the northeast is a curious blend of the softer and harder sides of Scottish geography, a diversity that lends it much appeal. The shoulder of Scotland juts out defiantly into the North Sea, which batters the coastal fishing towns with some force when aroused. Inland, however, is a more peaceful agricultural zone. Speyside is studded with dozens of distilleries, among them some of the most famous of Scottish malts; the Dee Valley runs through what at times can seem like fairy-tale woodland scenery.

Aberdeen itself was given a crucial boost when oil was discovered offshore. With fish stocks dwindling, the future had looked grim, but the city is now notably well-heeled thanks to its role as a service centre for the giant rigs.

The coast deserves exploration, particularly the impossibly picturesque village of Pennan and imposing Dunnottar Castle. Busy Braemar nestles among some awe-inspiring mountainscapes and is an excellent base for walking and, if snow comes, skiing.

ABERDEEN

☎ 01224 / pop 184,800 / elev 36m

The third city of Scotland, Aberdeen is a busy port and thriving settlement, with the offshore riches of the oil and gas reserves driving the economy. Its nickname 'The Granite City' may conjure up images of a dour, funless sort of town, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The whole city is indeed built of granite – even the roads are paved with the stuff – and on a sunny day every building glints cheerfully as the sun reflects off the spangling of mica particles. When it rains, as it likes to do in these parts, it can be a little less inspiring!

Aberdeen has some great museums and galleries, including, fittingly for a place which seems to have its back to the Highlands and its face out to sea, a maritime museum. Nearby, the bustling fish market opens at dawn as it has done for centuries.

The soft Aberdonian tones mingle here with the accents of transient multinational oilworkers and a large student population from around the country, ensuring that the inviting pubs, roaring clubs and decent restaurants are always busy.

History

Aberdeen was a prosperous North Sea trading and fishing port centuries before oil was considered a valuable commodity. After the townspeople supported Robert the Bruce against the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, the king rewarded the town with land for which he had previously received rent. The money was diverted into the Common Good Fund, to be spent on town amenities, as it still is today.

Since the 1970s, Aberdeen has become the main onshore service port for one of the largest oilfields in the world; its harbour is Britain's second busiest in terms of ship movement.

Orientation

Aberdeen is built on a ridge that runs east–west between the River Dee and River Don. Union St, the main commercial street, follows the line of the ridge. The bus and train stations are next to each other, off Guild St, south of Union St. The ferry quay is east of the bus and train stations, off Market St.

Old Aberdeen and the university are north of Union St. To the east lies a long stretch of clean, sandy beach.

Information

Central Library (☎ 652500; Rosemount Viaduct; 🕓 9am-8pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri & Sat) Free internet access; sessions limited to 30 minutes.

Ottakar's (☎ 592440; 3 Union Bridge; 🕓 daily) Central bookshop with a café.

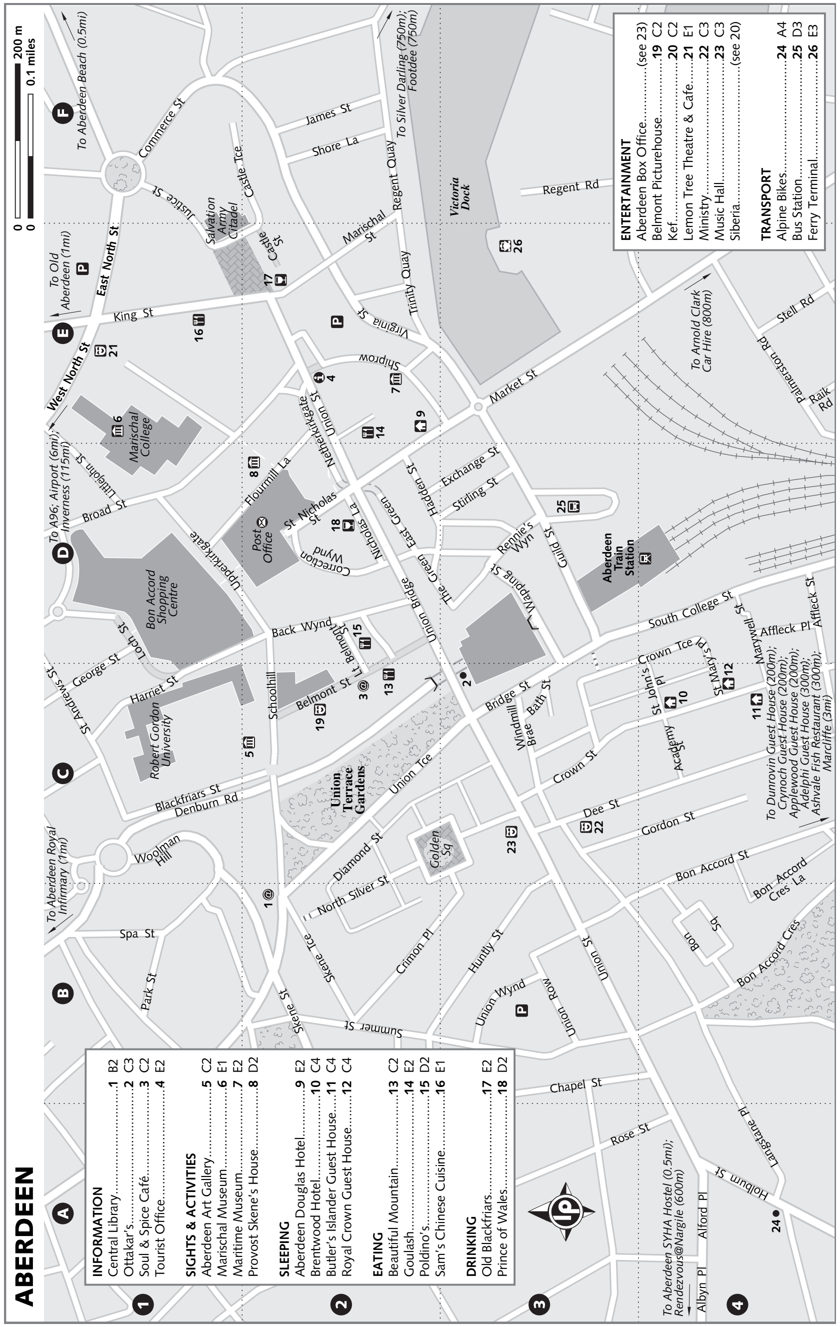
Soul & Spice Café (☎ 645200; 15 Belmont St; per hr £2; 🕓 10am-late) Friendly internet café above the One-Up record shop.

Tourist office (☎ 288828; 23 Union St; 🕓 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov–mid-Mar, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar–Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug). Very helpful. Internet access per 15 minutes £1.

Sights

MARITIME MUSEUM

Partly set in Aberdeen's oldest building, the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 337700; Shiprow; admission free; 🕓 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun; ♿) overlooks the harbour and is well worth a visit. There


ABERDEEN
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
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SLEEPING
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EATING
Beautiful Mountain 13 C2
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ENTERTAINMENT
Aberdeen Box Office (see 23)
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TRANSPORT
Alpine Bikes 24 A4
Bus Station 25 D3
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To Aberdeen Beach (0.5mi)
To Silver Darling (750m); Footdee (750m)
To Old Aberdeen (1mi)
To A96; Airport (6mi); Inverness (115mi)
To Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (1mi)
To Arnold Clark Car Hire (800m)
To Dunrovin Guest House (200m); Crynoch Guest House (200m); Applewood Guest House (300m); Adelphi Guest House (300m); Ashvale Fish Restaurant (300m); Marcliffe (3mi)
To Aberdeen SYHA Hostel (0.5mi); Rendezvous@Nargile (600m)
Victoria Dock
Marischal College
Salvation Army Citadel
Bon Accord Shopping Centre
Post Office
Robert Gordon University
Union Terrace Gardens
Golden Sq
Aberdeen Train Station
Commerce St
James St
Shore La
Regent Quay
Regent Rd
Justice St
Castle Tce
Castle St
East North St
West North St
King St
Marischal St
Trinity Quay
Virginia St
Shiprow
Market St
Union St
Netherkirkgate
Littlejohn St
Broad St
Flourmill La
St Nicholas St
St Nicholas La
Correction Wynd
Exchange St
Stirling St
Hadden St
East Green
The Green
Rennie's Wynd
Wapping St
Guild St
Upperkirkgate
Loch St
George St
St Andrew St
Harriet St
Schoolhill
Back Wynd
Belmont St
Union Bridge
Bridge St
Windmill Brae
Bath St
South College St
Crown Tce
St John's Pl
St Mary's Pl
Marywell St
Affleck Pl
Affleck St
Stell Rd
Palmerston Rd
Raik Rd
Academy St
Crown St
Dee St
Gordon St
Bon Accord St
Bon Accord Cres La
Bon Accord Cres
Blackfriars St
Denburn Rd
Union Tce
Woolman Hill
Diamond St
North Silver St
Spa St
Park St
Skene Tce
Crimon Pl
Huntly St
Union Wynd
Union Row
Skene St
Summer St
Chapel St
Rose St
Langstane Pl
Holburn St
Alford Pl
Albyn Pl

are lots of interactive displays, frightening statistics about the human impact on the ocean, and bags of information on life aboard an oil rig. There's even a translation of the mysterious BBC shipping forecast.

Sections on shipbuilding and technological advances over the centuries recall the days when speedy Aberdeen clippers competed on the tea runs from India and the Far East in the 19th century, and there's plenty of information about Aberdeen's important contemporary role as a port. The museum also has a good basement café.

PROVOST SKENE'S HOUSE

Surrounded by ugly concrete-and-glass office blocks, **Provost Skene's House** (☎ 641086; Broad St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun) is a late medieval, turreted town house near Marischal College, occupied in the 17th century by the provost (the Scots equivalent of a mayor).

Typical of its kind, the house has intimate, panelled rooms. The 1622 tempera-painted ceiling, with its Catholic symbolism, is unusual for having survived the depredation of the Reformation. It has undergone extensive restoration and is a gem of its time. There is also a small local history and archaeology museum.

MARISCHAL COLLEGE

In 1593 the fifth Earl Marischal founded this huge building (pronounced 'marshall'), which currently accommodates the science faculty of the University of Aberdeen. The present building is actually the second-largest granite structure in the world, after El Escorial near Madrid.

The quirky **Marischal Museum** (☎ 274301; Broad St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun) is refreshingly out of the ordinary. In one room there's a lively depiction of northeast Scotland arranged alphabetically; a good spot to learn a few Scots words! The other gallery is set up as an anthropological overview of the world, incorporating objects from vastly different cultures. It's arranged thematically, with Polynesian wooden masks alongside gasmasks and so on.

ABERDEEN ART GALLERY

Behind the grand façade of the **Aberdeen Art Gallery** (☎ 523700; Schoolhill; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; ♿) is a cool, white space that exhibits both the work of young contemporary painters and also more traditional works, including an excellent Victorian Scottish section, with many canvases by William Dyce. There's also a Rodin bronze and an extensive selection of watercolours and etchings, including a handful of Picassos and Chagalls.

OLD ABERDEEN

Old Aberdeen is a district north of the centre. The name is somewhat misleading, since the area south around the harbour is actually older; this area was named Alton in Gaelic, and this was anglicised to Old Town. It's a peaceful, genteel district, with stone mansions lining leafy lanes, and backing onto parkland. Many of the buildings belong to the university.

At the heart is imposing 15th-century **St Machar's Cathedral** (☎ 485988; Chanonry; 🕒 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar). One of the country's few examples of a fortified cathedral, it sits in a peaceful churchyard above the riverside parkland. According to legend, St Machar was ordered to establish a church where the river takes the shape of a bishop's crook, which it does just here. The cathedral is best known for its impressive heraldic ceiling, dating from 1520.

ABERDEEN HARBOUR

From Market St, Aberdeen's busy harbour stretches east to the mouth of the Dee. Here you can watch large ships sailing through the narrow navigation channel, and explore the delightful little district of **Footdee** (pronounced 'fiddy') with its picturesque 19th-century fishermen's cottages. North of here stretches the golden **beach**, scored by breakwaters.

Sleeping

Southwest of the centre, Bon Accord St and Great Western Rd are bristling with B&Bs. There are many oil workers in town during the week; it's easier finding accommodation at weekends, when many hotels drop their rates.

BUDGET

Aberdeen SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1100; www.syha.org.uk; 8 Queen's Rd; dm £15; Ⓟ 💻) This hostel a mile west of the train station is Aberdeen through and through, housed in a sturdy granite town house. There are good facilities including laundry service; beds are in small, clean dormitories, and there are two family rooms. Walk west along Union St and take the right fork along Albyn Pl until you reach a roundabout; Queen's Rd continues on the western side.

MIDRANGE

Adelphi Guest House (☎ 583078; www.adelphiguesthouse.com; 8 Whinhill Rd; s/d from £25/36) On the continuation of Bon Accord St, this B&B offers quiet rooms, some overlooking leafy parkland. All are comfortable and well-equipped, with cable TV and big firm beds; there are also several en-suite rooms available (singles/doubles £35/46), which are large enough for a family.

Applewood Guest House (☎ 580617; carolgarden154@aol.com; 154 Bon Accord St; s/d £25/40; Ⓟ) This bright and chirpy B&B is somewhat Tardis-like, with far more rooms and space than appears possible from outside. The rooms, some with en suite, are mostly large and all are clean as a whistle and comfortably appointed.

Dunrovin Guest House (☎ 586081; www.dunrovinguesthouse.co.uk; 168 Bon Accord St; s/d £30/50, without bathroom £25/40; Ⓟ) An excellent choice in the area; this friendly granite home has good rooms with great natural light and shiny modern en suites. The triple room, with lots of space, is particularly good for families.

Butler's Islander Guest House (☎ 212411; www.butlersguesthouse.com; 122 Crown St; d £60, s/d without bathroom £30/50; 💻) This cheery and welcoming spot is handy for both the centre and transport options. The rooms are light and cosy, most with small en-suite bathrooms, and there's free internet access for guests. Best of all is the charismatic breakfast menu, which features brose, a fortifying blend of porridge, whisky and honey that is guaranteed to send you out to see the sights in a good mood.

Brentwood Hotel (☎ 595440; www.brentwood-hotel.co.uk; 101 Crown St; s/d £82/92, Fri-Sun £40/59; Ⓟ) This friendly hotel is handily located and makes a reliable place to bed down, particularly at weekends, when the price is hugely reduced. There's a decent restaurant and a great bar below, with several real ales on tap.

Other recommendations:

Crynoch Guest House (☎ 582743; crynoch@btinternet.com; 164 Bon Accord St; B&B s/d from £28/50; Ⓟ wi-fi) Front rooms particularly lovely, and all have DVD player.

Royal Crown Guest House (☎ 586461; www.royalcrown.co.uk; 111 Crown St; s/d to £36/50; Ⓟ) Popular spot with eight small but well-furnished rooms.

TOP END

Aberdeen Douglas Hotel (☎ 582255; www.aberdeendouglas.com; 43 Market St; d from £95; wi-fi) The Douglas is an Aberdeen landmark that had fallen on hard times until new owners rescued and renovated it. Now it's a great, central option with classy executive rooms (from £135) kitted out with tasteful wooden furniture and crisp white linen. The standard rooms are also spacious, although not quite as inspiringly decorated.

Marcliffe (☎ 861000; www.marcliffe.com; North Deeside Rd; s/d from £155/175; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi ♿) Aberdeen's best hotel sits at the end of a winding driveway in 4 hectares of parkland, and is a lovely retreat. The rooms combine antique furniture and country-house comfort with stylish modern bathrooms; the restaurant offers fine Scottish produce with a massive wine list. You can fish on the River Dee within the grounds or indulge yourself with spa treatments. There are cheaper rates at weekends, and deals offered on the website.

Eating

Beautiful Mountain (☎ 645353; 13 Belmont St; snacks £2-7; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-4.30pm Sat) This is an excellent takeaway café with a great range of sandwiches and toasted ciabattas. Fillings are delicious and fresh. There's a small upstairs eat-in area and a relaxed buzz.

our pick **Foyer** (☎ 582277; Trinity Church, 82a Crown St; light lunches £5-7, mains £10-15; 🕒 food 11am-10pm Tue-Sat; ♿) Set in a converted church, this laudable gallery-restaurant funds an enterprise which assists homeless youth. The food is excellent, with many vegetarian and special-needs dietary choices; the menu changes regularly but is always interesting. The space itself is very attractive, and showcases contemporary art exhibitions; service comes with a smile.

Sam's Chinese Cuisine (☎ 626233; 13 King St; mains £8-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A hop away from Union St, this is a big jump – above the average Scottish Chinese takeaway – in class and imagination. The menu is well set-out and includes intriguing choices. The Peking duck is lusciously textured, the monkfish stir-fries are exquisite, while the 'volcanic' king prawns will have you grabbing for your glass in a hurry. Service is slow, but that's because the dishes are freshly prepared.

Rendezvous@Nargile (☎ 323700; 106 Forest Rd; mains £8-13; 🕒 noon-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm Mon-Sat) This is a newly opened restaurant of what is a highly regarded Aberdeen institution for high-quality Turkish food. A shared spread of *mezes* (starters) is the way to kick off; the tender treatment of meats characterises main courses. Note for the wise: if tempted by the Turkish wine, go for the best of them.

Silver Darling (☎ 576229; Pocra Quay; lunch mains £10-13, dinner mains £18-21; 🕐 noon-1.45pm Mon-Fri, 7-9.30pm Mon-Sat) With a great situation at the mouth of the Dee, this restaurant is named for the herring which used to drive the economy in these parts. Its reputation is lofty and deserved, with exquisite French seafood dishes in a stylish dining area overlooking the comings and goings of ships. The menu changes regularly; you might come across delights such as steamed halibut with salmon mousse and squid-ink pasta. Delicious.

Other recommendations:

Goulash (☎ 210530; 17 Adelphi; starters £2.95, mains £9.45; 🕐 7-10pm Tue-Fri, noon-10pm Sat) Authentic, charismatic, eccentric Hungarian eatery off Union St. Tasty stews and good people.

Ashvale Fish Restaurant (☎ 596981; 46 Great Western Rd; mains £5-9; 🕐 11.45am-11pm; 🅿) Battered seafood and sizzling steaks, with plenty to eat and do for kids.

Poldino's (☎ 647777; 7 Little Belmont St; pastas £6-9, other mains £13-18; 🕐 noon-2.30pm & 6-10.45pm Mon-Sat) Long-time Italian favourite; the pricy seafood mains are more memorable than the pasta.

Drinking

Belmont St is the focus of Aberdeen's lively nightlife, with a wide range of style bars and preclub venues.

Prince of Wales (☎ 640597; 7 St Nicholas Lane) Aberdeen's best-known pub is in an alley off Union St. Boasting a counter that stretches to the horizon, gnarled wooden floorboards, and a buzz of soft Aberdonian accents lubricated by a range of guest beers, it's a haven of good cheer and a Scottish pub par excellence.

Old Blackfriars (☎ 581922; 52 Castlegate) The most intimate of the inner-city pubs, this is a great traditional bar with low roofs, timber interior and a warrenlike layout. There's nothing pretentious about it, and it makes a great place for a drizzly evening. There's also a pleasing range of bar food.

Entertainment

To find out about current listings check *What's on in Aberdeen*, available from the tourist office. You can book tickets for most events at the **Aberdeen Box Office** (☎ 641122; Union St) by the Music Hall.

CINEMAS

Belmont Picturehouse (☎ 343534; 49 Belmont St) Superbly located for a postmovie debrief over a pint or a G&T, this cinema shows new releases, arthouse classics, and themed series of films. Essential.

NIGHTCLUBS

Belmont St is the place to go for preclub action; check the noticeboards in One-Up Records at number 17 for upcoming club nights.

Ministry (☎ 594585; 16 Dee St; cover £2-6; 🕐 10.30pm-2am or 3am Wed-Sat) Like so many of Aberdeen's restaurants, pubs and clubs, this is housed in a former church – have the people lost their faith? Fashions change, but on our visit, this was unquestionably the city's premier club. Two floors of high-quality sound.

Kef (☎ 684000; 9 Belmont St; admission free-£5; 🕐 11pm-2am or 3am) One of the city's most popular venues, with decadent cushions backing a Moorish design concept. Echoes of the Middle East are less prominent around the lager-soaked bar and the decks, from which a range of high-quality sounds emanate. Attached is Siberia, a cool pub and vodka bar with a conservatory space – perfect for relaxing before hitting the club. It also does some innovative pub food.

THEATRE & MUSIC

Music Hall (☎ 632080; www.musichallaberdeen.co.uk; Union St) Right in the heart of town, this is the main venue for classical-music concerts.

Lemon Tree Theatre & Cafe (☎ 642230; www.lemontree.org; 5 West North St) This has an interesting programme of dance, music or drama. It hosts festivals and often has rock, jazz and folk bands playing. The café does good lunches from Thursday to Sunday.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Seven miles northwest of the city centre, **Aberdeen airport** (☎ 722331), known as Dyce, has numerous domestic flights, including to Orkney and Shetland, and a few European flights, including some budget routes to Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark (check out www.whichbudget.com for up-to-date information). Bus 27 runs there from Union St regularly (35 minutes).

BOAT

The passenger terminal is a short walk east of the train and bus stations. **NorthLink Ferries** (☎ 0845 6000 449; www.northlinkferries.com), a CalMac subsidiary, has taken over the operation of car ferries from Aberdeen to Lerwick (passenger £20.40 to £31.20 depending on season, car £82.80 to £111.30, cabins £18 to £106; 12 to 14 hours, daily) on the Shetland Islands, and Kirkwall (passenger £15.10 to £23.80, car and driver £74.60 to £84.40, six hours, three to four weekly) on the Orkney Islands.

BUS

Citylink runs to Dundee (£9.40, two hours, more than hourly), Edinburgh (£18.19, 3¼ hours, hourly), Glasgow (£18.19, 3½ hours, hourly) and Perth (£14.59, 2½ hours, hourly), among other destinations. There are discounted fares at www.megabus.com for some departures on these routes. Stagecoach runs to Inverness (£11.50, 3¾ hours, hourly).

TRAIN

Destinations served from Aberdeen by rail include Edinburgh (£34.90, 2½ hours, hourly or more frequently), Glasgow (£34.90, 2½ hours, hourly), Dundee (£20.70, 1¼ hours, two hourly), Inverness (£21.50, 2¼ hours, five to 10 daily) and Perth (£24.40, 1½ hours, hourly).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

For bike rental, hit **Alpine Bikes** (☎ 211455; www.alpinebikes.co.uk; 64 Holburn St; 🕐 9am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am-8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun). Mountain bikes cost £15 per day during the week and £30 for the weekend (Friday evening to Monday morning).

BUS

The main local operator is **First Aberdeen** (☎ 650 065; www.firstgroup.com). The most useful services are buses 18, 19 and 24 from Union St to Great Western Rd, bus 27 from the bus station to the SYHA Hostel, and bus 20 for Old Aberdeen.

CAR

There are several car-rental companies in Aberdeen. **Arnold Clark** (☎ 249159; www.arnoldclarkrental.co.uk; Girdleness Rd; 🕐 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) has rates starting at £23 per day for a small car.

AROUND ABERDEEN

Stonehaven

☎ 01569 / pop 9580

A pretty, low-key seaside resort 15 miles south of Aberdeen, Stonehaven is nestled around a bay with some good walks and one of the most spectacularly situated castles in the country. The **tourist office** (☎ 762806; 66 Allardice St; 🕐 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) is very helpful.

The most pleasant way to reach **Dunnottar Castle** (☎ 762173; adult/child £4/1; 🕐 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, 9am-dusk Fri-Mon Nov-Mar), is on foot; it's about a 15-minute walk from the harbour. The castle ruins are sensational, spread out across a grassy promontory rising 45m above the sea. The original fortress was built in the 9th century; the keep is the most substantial remnant, but the restored **Drawing Room** is more interesting.

our pick A hugely appealing place to stay is **Twentyfourshorehead** (☎ 767750; www.twentyfourshorehead.co.uk; 24 Shorehead; s/d £50/60). Right on the harbour in a 300-year-old former cooperage, it's a hugely relaxing spot renovated with taste and flair. The bright rooms have big bay windows looking over the water and, using the binoculars thoughtfully provided, you can spot birds and seals.

There are regular buses to Stonehaven from Aberdeen (45 minutes, at least hourly), some continuing to Dundee. There are also trains on the same route.

DEESIDE & DONSIDE

This area west and southwest of Aberdeen is outstandingly beautiful, with the pretty woodlands of the Dee valley giving way to some epic mountain scenery around Braemar and Glenshee. There's fantastic walking and skiing in this zone, as well as the Queen's Scottish residence at Balmoral. The tourist offices have information on the Castle Trail to explore the many other fine baronial buildings, but you will need your own wheels.

Balmoral Castle

This **castle** (☎ 01339-742534; www.balmoralcastle.com; adult/child £6/2, parking 70p; 🕐 10am-5pm Easter-Jul; ♿) was built for Queen Victoria in 1855 as a private residence for the royal family. It sits in a privileged and beautiful position by the Dee, which looks like a children's picturebook river here. In truth, the somewhat hefty entrance fee is mainly for the grounds, as visitors are only allowed into one room of the castle – a ballroom stocked with rather uninteresting memorabilia. Walking around the gardens, however, is delightful on a nice day, although the flowers don't bloom until the Queen's stay in August. Perhaps best is the audio tour, which, although a little sycophantic, brings

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (complete with Bavarian accent) to life.

Balmoral is just off the A93 (where there's a tourist office) near the village of Crathie and can be reached on buses running between Aberdeen and Braemar. The castle website has details of various self-catering cottages in the grounds that are let out on a weekly basis.

Braemar & Around

☎ 01339 / pop 410 / elev 312m

Braemar, surrounded by mountains, has long been a visitors' favourite and a base for walking or skiing at nearby Glenshee. Although it gets busy with coach parties, it still makes a good stop; it's at its best in the evenings when, breathing the fresh mountain air, urbanites tend to wonder why they live in a city.

The **tourist office** (☎ 741600; The Mews, Mar Rd; 🕑 daily) has lots of useful information on walks in the area.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

North of the village, turreted **Braemar Castle** dates from 1628, and was a garrison post after the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. It is now closed to visitors, perhaps permanently.

An easy walk from Braemar is up **Creag Choinnich** (538m), a hill to the east above the A93. There are route markers and the walk takes about 1½ hours. For a longer walk (three hours) and superb views of the Cairngorms, climb **Morrone** (859m), the mountain south of Braemar. Five miles west of Braemar is the tiny settlement of **Inverey**: numerous mountain walks start from here, including the adventurous **Lairig Ghru trail** – 24 miles over the pass to Aviemore. Another fine place for leisurely hiking is around the beautiful **Linn of Dee gorge**, a couple of miles beyond Inverey.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On the first Saturday in September, the **Braemar Gathering** (Highland Games) brings tens of thousands to the village; bookings during this period are essential.

SLEEPING

our pick **Rucksacks** (☎ 741517; 15 Mar Rd; dm £12, bothy £7, tw £30; 💻 ♿) What was already a fabulous hostel for walkers and travellers has been made even better. A shiny new building out the back now houses the dorms, but all the creature comforts are still there; barbecue, communal kitchen, drying room, laundry service, internet terminal and even a proper sauna! The well-loved Alpine hut – bring your own bedding – offers simpler berths. Even if you're not staying here, you can use the internet (from 10.30am to 4.30pm) or put on a load of washing – nothing is too much trouble for the enthusiastic, welcoming owner.

Craiglea (☎ 741641; www.craigleabraemar.com; Hillside Dr; s/d to £30/52) This guesthouse is run by a friendly young family and has very pleasing, spacious rooms painted in bright colours, including one that boasts a luxury bathtub. It's a top spot for walkers, with outdoors magazines, plenty of advice, a MemoryMap route planner for guests' use, and packed lunches available.

Other recommendations:

Braemar Lodge (☎ 741627; www.braemarlodge.co.uk; Glenshee Rd; dm £11, s/d £35/70, self-catering log cabins per week £300-400; 🅿) Restored shooting lodge on the outskirts of the town, with a range of accommodation.

Inverey SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1126; www.syha.org.uk; dm £11.75; 🕑 May-Sep) Very basic walkers' digs in a beautiful, isolated spot. A mile beyond Inverey.

St Margarets (☎ 741697; 13 School Rd; s/tw £25/46) One room only, bedecked with sunflowers. And a big, genuine welcome. Grab it if you can.

EATING

Most of the places to eat in Braemar are the pubs and hotels, of which the Braemar Lodge does the best evening meals (from 6pm to 8.30pm). There is nowhere to eat or drink in Inverey.

Gathering Place (☎ 741234; Invercauld Rd; mains £10-14; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sun) This modern bistro on the riverbank is one of two of the more sophisticated Braemar eating options, offering contemporary Scottish flavours with a Mediterranean twist. Tasty creations such as rabbit cassoulet or haggis filo parcels are the pleasing result, and are complemented by a good range of wines and welcoming service. Future uncertain at the time of research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Stagecoach Bluebird bus 201 from Aberdeen to Braemar (£8, 2¼ hours, hourly daily, two-hourly on Sunday) travels along the Dee valley. Postbus 072 leaves Braemar daily Monday to Saturday for Inverey, the SYHA Hostel, and the Linn of Dee.

Glenshee

☎ 01250

The route south from Braemar along the A93, through Glenshee, is one of the most spectacular drives in the country. Meandering burns, tussocked grass, and stark soaring peaks, splotched with glaring snow, dwarf open-mouthed drivers. It's an awe-inspiring piece of Highland landscape.

Glenshee Ski Centre (☎ 01339-741320; www.ski-glenshee.co.uk; daily lift pass £23) is Britain's major ski resort, but snow cover is unreliable. While it'll never see the Winter Olympics, it is, however, a cheery, family-friendly place, and has 36 pistes. One of the chairlifts heads up to the top of the Cairwell (933m).

As well as the accommodation centres of Braemar to the north and Blairgowrie to the south, there are places to stay in Spittal of Glenshee, 6 miles south of the resort. **Spittal of Glenshee Hotel** (☎ 885215; www.spittalofglenshee.co.uk; dm £17.45, r per person £24-36; 🅿) is a very 'Scottish experience' – it's a friendly ski-style lodge with a big bar serving massive portions of comfort food. There are rooms with and without en suite; as well there's a bunkhouse, and all rates include breakfast. It's a good base for walking too, and you can take a companion – one of the hotel dogs!

our pick **Dalmunzie House** (☎ 885224; www.dalmunzie.com; Glenshee; s/d from £60/120, 4-course dinner £36; 🅿 💻 ♿) is a grand property situated in a glen among bare hills, 1.25 miles north of Spittal on a side road. There's great walking on the vast estate as well as the highest golf course in Britain. Inside it's all roaring fires, leather armchairs, wood panelling and, in some of the rooms, posh four-post beds. There's a beautiful library, set up to help people research their Scottish forefathers.

There is a **Strathtay Scottish** (☎ 01738-629339; www.stagecoachbus.com) service from Perth to Blairgowrie (50 minutes, about six daily). The only service from Blairgowrie to the Glenshee area is the once-daily Monday to Saturday postbus to Spittal of Glenshee.

NORTHERN ABERDEENSHIRE & MORAY

Heading north from Aberdeen, the coastal road runs up to Fraserburgh, at the 'shoulder' of Scotland. From here it's a very pleasant, leisurely journey west to Inverness, via some magical fishing villages. The more direct Aberdeen to Inverness route cuts across country; both routes meet at Elgin, the genteel capital of the ancient county of Moray (pronounced murray). South of here, the whisky-drenched Speyside region awaits.

Pennan & Around

☎ 01261 / pop 22

The tiny harbour hamlet of Pennan, built at the base of steep cliffs, is one of the gems of this part of Scotland's coast. The single street of houses in this former fishing settlement seems completely at the mercy of the grey sea; it's an unforgettable location that was immortalised in the mouse-that-roared British classic *Local Hero*.

our pick **Pennan Inn** (☎ 561201; www.thepennaninn.com; r £60, without bathroom £40, with sea view £70-80), along with the village's red phonebox, featured prominently in the film. The beating heart of this community, it's recently been refurbished and does innovative, delicious bar food (£8 to £10; try the venison burger) as well as restaurant meals. The rooms are small but cosy. While Pennan is gorgeous on a sunny day, it's particularly memorable if the weather turns harsh and the wind and rain drum at the windows!

The nearby village of **Crovie** (crivvy) is similarly atmospheric. The remoteness of these towns meant that they became important harbours for the movement of illicitly distilled whisky.

Stagecoach Bluebird buses run north from Aberdeen to Fraserburgh (£5.50, 1½ hours, at least hourly). Onward buses running from Fraserburgh to Banff stop at the junctions to these villages, from where it's a short but steep downhill walk.

Banff & Macduff

☎ 01261 / pop 3990 (combined)

A popular seaside resort, the twin towns of Banff and Macduff (elevation 37m) are separated by Banff Bridge, which spans the River Deveron. Banff is a fairly genteel little town and nearby Macduff is a busy fishing port; there's been an almost comical historical rivalry between the two. The **tourist office** (☎ 812419; High St, Banff; 🕑 Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, Mon-Sun Jul & Aug) has plenty of brochures about the area and is helpful.

Duff House (☎ 818181; www.duffhouse.com; adult/child £5.50/4.50; 🕑 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Mar), in Banff, is an impressive Georgian baroque mansion designed by William Adam. Completed in 1749, it's been a hotel, hospital and POW camp and is now an art gallery housing a collection of paintings from the National Gallery of Scotland. The House hosts regular live performances including theatre and dance; call to find out what's on.

Not to be outdone, Macduff has a good attraction of its own; the **Marine Aquarium** (☎ 833 369; www.marine-aquarium.com; 11 High Shore; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm; ♿). It's an enthusiastic place and particularly interesting because it focuses on local species rather than piranhas and sharks.

Stagecoach Bluebird runs buses from Aberdeen and Elgin (one hour, hourly) to Banff and Macduff.

Elgin

☎ 01343 / pop 20,800 / elev 21m

At the heart of Moray, Elgin has been the provincial capital since the 13th century. One of the country's sunniest towns, Elgin is a sedate sort of place, very pleasant but without a great deal going on. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 542666; 17 High St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 11am-3pm Sun Apr-Oct) dishes out an abundance of leaflets.

Elgin Cathedral (HS; ☎ 547171; adult/child £4/1.60; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar) is made of soft sandstone and is undergoing constant restoration, though it must have been magnificent once. It's known as the 'lantern of the north', and was consecrated in 1224. In 1390 it was burnt down by the infamous Wolf of Badenoch (below). It was rebuilt, but ruined once more in the Reformation.

There are several guesthouses and B&Bs, including the central **Heather Glen** (☎ 545221; www.heather-glen.com; 1 North Guildry St; r per person £23; 🅿), in a noble stone house near the fabulous Gordon & Macphail whisky shop and deli.

our pick **Old Church of Urquhart** (☎ 843063; www.oldkirk.co.uk; Parrandier; s/d £36/52; 🅿) has by far the most character in Elgin. It's a fabulous conversion of a 19th-century church, 5 miles northeast. There are bikes for hire and tasty home-cooked dinners. The friendly owner will pick you up from Elgin train station.

Hourly services along the coast by Stagecoach Bluebird run to Banff and Macduff (one hour), south to Dufftown (50 minutes), west to Inverness (one hour), and southeast to Aberdeen (£9.25, two hours). Trains run four to 10 times daily from Elgin to Aberdeen and Inverness.

Speyside

Beautiful Speyside is a region of rolling green hills, dark forests and sparkling streams. It's a place of particular interest to walkers and, of course, whisky lovers. There's a vast number of distilleries in a small area here, including most of the famous names in the pantheon of Scottish malts. The Speyside style tends towards the rich, sweet, and nutty, and they are many people's favourite tipple. The region is best explored by car, but the **Speyside Way** is a footpath that follows a disused rail line from Aviemore in the Cairngorms to the coast at Spey Bay and on to Buckie, passing through utterly tranquil riverside scenery and not a few distilleries.

DUFFTOWN

☎ 01340

'Rome may be built on seven hills, but Dufftown's built on seven stills' claim locals. It's a good base for the area, with seven operational distilleries in town. It was founded only in 1817 by James Duff, fourth Earl of Fife. The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 820501; 9a The Sq; 🕒 Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, Mon-Sun Jul & Aug) is in the clock tower.

The **Davaar in Dufftown** (☎ 820464; www.davaardufftown.co.uk; 17 Church St; s/d £35/50) is a welcoming guesthouse in the centre of town. Rooms are snug and attractive, and the breakfast is great. You can hire mountain bikes to explore the area too. **La Faisanderie** (☎ 821273; The Sq; set lunch/dinner £13.50/24; 🕒 dinner Wed-Mon, lunch Thu-Mon) is a great place to eat, run by a respected local chef. The interior is decorated in French auberge style with a cheerful mural and pheasants hiding in every corner. The set menu, which features plenty of game, won't disappoint; you can order à la carte as well.

THE WOLF OF BADENOCH

Of all the hard figures of medieval Scotland, few inspired as much terror as Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan (1343–1405), illegitimate son of the king and better known as the Wolf of Badenoch. A cruel landowner with a number of castles in the Strathspey region, he was not a man to get on the wrong side of, as the Bishop of Moray found out in 1390. When the earl ditched his wife in favour of his mistress, the bishop excommunicated him. The monk that bore the message of excommunication was thrown headfirst into a well, and the infuriated Wolf, accompanied by a band of 'wild and wicked Highland men', embarked on an orgy of destruction, burning first Forres, then Elgin, to the ground, destroying the cathedral and nearby Pluscarden Abbey in the process. Amazingly, Stewart still managed to end up being buried in Dunkeld cathedral. Legend says his death occurred on a dark, stormy night. The Devil came calling on a black horse and challenged the Wolf to a game of chess. The Wolf was checkmated, and the devil took his life (and soul) as prize.

BLAZE YOUR OWN WHISKY TRAIL

Visiting a whisky distillery can be a memorable experience, but only hardcore malt fans will probably want to go to more than two or three. While there are some excellent ones to visit, others are depressingly corporate. Here are some of the more worthwhile in Speyside:

Aberlour (☎ 01340-881249; www.aberlour.com; tour £7.50, 🕒 10.30am & 2pm daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Fri by appointment Nov-Mar) Excellent, detailed tour with a proper tasting session. On the main street in Aberlour.

Glenfarclas (☎ 01807-500257; www.glenfarclas.co.uk; admission £3.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, plus 10am-4pm Sat Jul-Sep) Small, friendly and independent. Five miles south of Aberlour on the Grantown road. Last tour leaves 90 minutes before closing.

Glenfiddich (☎ 820373; www.glenfiddich.com; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Oct–Easter, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun Easter–mid-Oct). Big and busy, but handiest for Dufftown. Standard tour is free but packaged, but there's a very good Connoisseur's Tour (£15, must be booked). Glenfiddich single-handedly kept malt whisky alive in the dark years.

Macallan (☎ 01340-872280; www.themacallan.com; standard tour free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) Highly rated sherry-casked malt. Several tours available (last tour at 3.30pm), including an expert one that requires prebooking (£15). Lovely location 2 miles northwest of Craigellachie.

Other whisky tips:

- Getting around to some of these distilleries can be tricky. Even if you've got your own wheels, there are obvious benefits to leaving the car behind. **Heavenly Highlands** (☎ 01807-590438; www.heavenlyhighlands.com) run a bespoke whisky taxi service – very handy indeed!
- The **Speyside Cooperage** (☎ 01340-871108; www.speysidecooperage.co.uk; admission £3.10; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a spot where you can see the fascinating art of barrel-making in action. Between Craigellachie and Dufftown.
- The **Spirit of Speyside** (www.spiritofspeyside.com) is an annual whisky festival in Dufftown in early May with plenty of great events that should be booked well ahead. There's another festival in late September.
- During summer, there are weekly whisky nosing sessions in Dufftown. These take place on Tuesday evenings at 8.30pm. Book on ☎ 01340-821097 or whiskyshop@dufftown.co.uk.

Stagecoach Bluebird links Dufftown to Elgin (50 minutes, hourly). Enthusiasts run a heritage railway between Keith and Dufftown; services operate three times a day over summer weekends.

AROUND DUFFTOWN

The River Fiddich runs from Dufftown for 3 miles before joining the Spey at attractive **Craigellachie**, on the Speyside Way. Two miles southwest, also on the Way, the charming village of **Aberlour** is worth a visit. The home of Walkers, whose buttery shortbread is seen around the world, it boasts a fine local pub next to the old station. The **Mash Tun** (☎ 01340-881771; 7 Broomfield Sq; light meals £5.95, mains £7-13; 🕒 food noon-9pm) is built of reassuringly solid stone and has a great line-up of real ales, plenty of local whisky, filling bar meals and rooms upstairs (singles/doubles £50/70). Hourly buses link Dufftown, Craigellachie and Aberlour, but there is also a scenic 4-mile path from Dufftown to Aberlour, clearly waymarked.

DUNDEE & ANGUS

One of the less-visited corners of Scotland, the Dundee area has traditionally been more concerned with making a living than prettifying itself for tourism. It makes an appealing destination for precisely this reason. It's attractive too, with a hinterland of peaceful glens meandering towards the sea.

The city of Dundee is far from fashionable but certainly deserves a visit. It has been busy transforming itself from moribund industrial centre to a bright modern city, and has great cultural centres, lively student life, and a few excellent attractions, including the superb Verdant Works jute museum.

Within easy reach of Dundee are two excellent attractions; Glamis Castle, where the bloody deeds of *Macbeth* are set, and Arbroath Abbey, where a day trip can be fuelled by lunching on one of Scotland's tastiest dishes, the smokie.

Getting Around

Strathtay Scottish (☎ 01382-228054; www.stagecoachbus.com) is the main bus operator between Dundee and places in Angus. Trains run east along the scenic coastline from Dundee to Arbroath and Montrose.

DUNDEE

☎ 01382 / pop 154,700 / elev 75m

Scotland's fourth-largest city is a place that still has a grim reputation in parts. This was once deserved, as severe urban poverty and poor civic planning took their toll in the wake of the collapse of traditional industries, but now the city is anxiously moving forward. Dundee's superb location on the Firth of Tay is finally being taken advantage of, and the presence of several top-drawer attractions – the super Verdant Works museum among them – is bringing public opinion of the city slowly, but very surely, around.

Dundee –the most Scottish of cities – was traditionally driven by the 'three Js'; jute, journalism and jam. The jam refers to Dundee marmalade, while jute is explained in detail at Verdant Works. Journalism was the *Desperate Dan* and *Beano* comics; Dan himself stands proud in the city's main square.

Dundee is a city of two halves, with the centre's somewhat hard-bitten feel counterbalanced by lively Perth Rd just to the west, which has a youthful, arty flair given weight by a series of most appealing places to eat and socialise. Broughty Ferry, a few miles east, has always been where Dundonians, the most open and welcoming of folk, head for during weekends to stroll on the beach or nestle down with a pint and a pub lunch.

History

In the 19th century, Dundee was a major player in the shipbuilding and railway engineering industries. Then came the rise of jute and, since whale oil was used in the process, whaling developed alongside. At one time there were as many as 41,000 people employed in the textile industry and as the jute workers became redundant, tough economic times led to the city developing a reputation as one of the most 'red' in Britain. Winston Churchill, who was once MP for Dundee, described speaking to 'an audience of lions with Communist teeth'. The city was also important in the suffragette movement.

Orientation

Most people approach the city from the Tay Rd Bridge or along the A90 from Perth; both routes take you into the centre. Stretching west of the centre, Perth Rd is home to the university and nearly all the city's best places to eat and drink.

Information

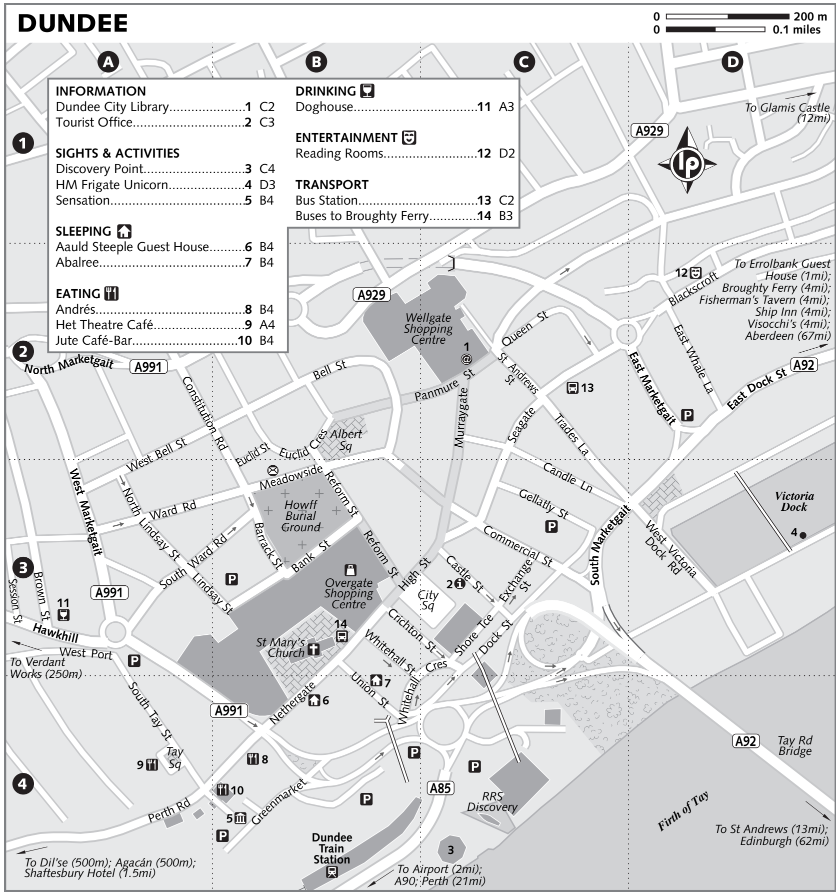
Dundee City Library (Wellgate Shopping Centre, Panmure St; 🕘 9.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 527527; enquires@angusanddundee.co.uk; 21 Castle St; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) Helpful. Internet access £1 for 15 minutes.

Sights

VERDANT WORKS

One of Britain's best museums, **Verdant Works** (☎ 225282; www.verdantworks.com; West Henderson's Wynd; adult/child £5.95/3.85, combined ticket with Discovery Point £10.95/7; 🕘 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun Nov-Mar; ♿) brings the history of Dundee's jute industry dramatically to life. The museum is housed in a restored jute mill; your visit begins with a charismatic guided tour, with plenty of atmosphere given by recorded voices with impenetrable Dundonian accents. The whole process of jute making is explained, and staff demonstrate the working of the production line with functioning machines. There's a display of social history that gives the visit so much more meaning than just jute; the museum as a whole makes powerful statements about the rise and fall of heavy industry and its effect on the ordinary population. There's plenty here to keep the kids entertained as well, and the enthusiasm and humour of the staff make it a memorable experience.



DUNDEE

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Euclid Cres
Albert Sq
Meadowside
Ward Rd
North Lindsay St
South Ward Rd
Lindsay St
Barrack St
Bank St
Reform St
Howff Burial Ground
Overgate Shopping Centre
St Mary's Church
Wellgate Shopping Centre
Panmure St
Murraygate
Queen St
St Andrews St
Seagate
Trades La
Candle Ln
Gellatly St
Commercial St
Castle St
Exchange St
High St
City Sq
Crichton St
Whitehall St
Whitehall Cres
Shore Tce
Dock St
Union St
Nethergate
Greenmarket
Perth Rd
South Tay St
Tay Sq
Brown St
Session St
Hawkhill
West Port
To Verdant Works (250m)
Blackscroft
East Whale La
East Dock St
West Victoria Dock Rd
Victoria Dock
To Errolbank Guest House (1mi); Broughty Ferry (4mi); Fisherman's Tavern (4mi); Ship Inn (4mi); Visocchi's (4mi); Aberdeen (67mi)
Tay Rd Bridge
Firth of Tay
To St Andrews (13mi); Edinburgh (62mi)
RRS Discovery
Dundee Train Station
To Airport (2mi); A90; Perth (21mi)
To Dil'se (500m); Agacán (500m); Shaftesbury Hotel (1.5mi)
P

DISCOVERY POINT

It's worth checking out **Discovery Point** (☎ 201 245; www.rrsdiscovery.com; adult/child £6.45/3.85, combined ticket with Verdant Works £10.95/7; 🕘 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Nov-Mar), centred on Captain Scott's famous polar expedition vessel, *Discovery*, which was constructed here in 1900 with a hull more than half a metre thick to survive the Antarctic pack ice. Scott sailed for the Antarctic in 1901 and, in a not uneventful voyage, spent two winters trapped in the ice as the endeavour ended in disaster. There are some excellent displays on Antarctic exploration and the expedition, and you can then go on board the ship to see the cabins used by Scott and his crew.

HM FRIGATE UNICORN

Constructed in 1824, the **Unicorn** (☎ 200900; www.frigateunicorn.org; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕘 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, noon-4pm Wed-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is the oldest British-built warship still afloat – perhaps that's because it never saw action.

Wandering around the frigate's four decks gives a good impression of what it must have been like for the 300-strong crew to live in such cramped conditions. The *Unicorn* is berthed in Victoria Dock, east of the Tay Rd Bridge. The entry price includes a guided tour.

SENSATION

Another impressive Dundee attraction is this modern **museum** (☎ 228800; www.sensation.org.uk; Greenmarket; adult/child £6.50/4.50; 🕘 10am-5pm; 💻 ♿)

designed for the young and the energetic. It's a great place for kids, tired perhaps of art galleries and noble buildings, to reclaim the holiday. As the name suggests, the place is designed interactively, with dozens of hands-on attractions in five halls based on each of the senses. A giant head gives you the chance to slide down the nostril; elsewhere you can experience zero-gravity in a gyroscope (be prepared to queue) or explore the innards of a leaf.

BROUGHTY FERRY

This pleasant suburb, known to locals simply as 'the Ferry', is 4 miles east of Dundee. There's a long, sandy beach and great views across the Firth of Tay to Fife.

Broughty Castle Museum (HS; ☎ 436916; Castle Green; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, closed Mon Oct-Mar) is a reconstructed 16th-century tower guarding the entrance to the Firth of Tay. Its historical exhibitions includes information on Dundee's whaling industry and great views.

The easiest way to get to Broughty Ferry is to take buses 40, 75, 76 or 80 from Nethergate.

Sleeping

Broughty Ferry is quite a good place to base yourself, with a high number of B&Bs, particularly along Monifieth Rd.

BUDGET

Abalree (☎ 223867; fax 229239; 20 Union St; s/d without bathroom £20/34) Right in the city centre, this is a very sound budget guesthouse run by enthusiastic, dyed-in-the-wool Dundonians who love a chat. The building's dark staircase gives no clue of the colourful and comfortable rooms with TV inside. Shared bathrooms are small but clean, and there's 24-hour access. It's easier to get a room at weekends. Great value.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Aauld Steeple Guest House (☎ 200302; 94 Nethergate; s/d £23/40) This is extremely central, and great for buses and shops. Rooms are simple, clean and tidy with tartan blankets and decent beds; there's a variety of them, some with their own shower. Some doubles are particularly spacious and overlook St Marys Church. The only problem can be noise from the pissed and disorderly outside at weekends.

Ashley House (☎ 776109; www.ashley-house.com; 15 Monifieth Rd, Broughty Ferry; s/d £25/50; P) This comfortable guesthouse has long been one of the best of the Broughty Ferry B&Bs and, under cheery new ownership, will hopefully continue to be. There are four excellent rooms, equipped with DVD player and top-notch beds; one has a particularly grand bathroom. It's a short walk from here to the centre of Broughty Ferry – along Brook St.

Errolbank Guest House (☎/fax 462118; 9 Dalgleish Rd; s/d to £32/52; P) This quiet family home is a mile east of the centre in a quiet leafy street. It's a friendly, peaceful hideaway with easy bus access to and from the centre and Broughty Ferry. Some rooms have a view of the firth, and are decorated with flowery cheeriness. The breakfasts are also worthy of praise. No credit cards accepted.

Fisherman's Tavern (☎ 775941; 10 Fort St, Broughty Ferry; s/d £35/56) No more wondering how to get home after a night at the Ferry's best pub; there are rooms to crash in! Modern and stylish, with soft colours and textures, they are on the small side but attractive and comfortable, with good bathrooms. A very atmospheric place to stay, although perhaps not for the light sleeper. Breakfast is available for an extra £4.

Shaftesbury Hotel (☎ 669216; www.shaftesbury-hotel.co.uk; 1 Hyndford St; s/d £60/88; ♿) This former jute baron's mansion is in a quiet spot in the west of town and is Dundee's most interesting hotel. There's a quirky range of rooms, many preserving much period character. Number 12 is the most appealing, and can be set up for a family. Easy streetside parking.

Eating

Nearly all the best places to eat are on and around Perth Rd.

Visocchi's (☎ 779297; 40 Gray St, Broughty Ferry; pasta & pizza £6-10; 🕒 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Thu, to 9.30pm Fri & Sat, to 5.30pm Sun) This ice-cream shop and café is an institution in the Ferry. It's all things to all people, whether you're after a tasty vanilla cone to lick on the beach, a quick pizza before a night out or a seriously strong double espresso the morning after.

our pick **Jute Café-Bar** (☎ 909246; Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, Nethergate; mains £7-13; 🕒 food 10am-4pm, 5-9.30pm, bar open till midnight; ♿) The Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre is a great place, with cinemas, galleries and this cracker of a spot to eat and drink. The open-plan area exudes a welcoming buzz, there's outdoor seating, and a big range of edibles, from tasty panini sandwiches to elegant Asian-Mediterranean fusion dishes at dinnertime.

Dil'se (☎ 221501; 99 Perth Rd; mains £7-14; 🕒 noon-2.30pm & 4.30-11pm Sun-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat; ♿) This busy and boisterous star of the Dundee eating scene is a Bangladeshi restaurant offering dishes that just burst with flavour. It's a large, glass-fronted spot as innovative in its modern lines as its mouth-watering menu. Old favourites are irresistibly flavoursome, while innovations such as Mas Bangla, which is an unexpected take on Scottish salmon, are equally unforgettable.

André's (☎ 224455; 134a Nethergate; 2-course lunch £7.50, mains £8-11; 🕒 noon-3pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sat, 1-10pm Sun) This loveable little place is a gem, with authentic and tasty French food at very palatable prices. You walk past André himself, working away in the kitchen, on your way to the small, attractive dining area. With friendly, unobtrusive service and some decent wines, it's a real winner.

Other good spots:

Het Theatre Café (☎ 206699; Tay Sq; mains £7-11; 🕒 café 10am-late Mon-Sat, restaurant lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ♿) Chic arty hang-out at the Dundee Rep Theatre, a great place for coffee, snack or meal. Many veggie choices.

Agacán (☎ 644227; 113 Perth Rd; mains £9-12; 🕒 5-9.30pm Tue-Sun) Bags of charisma and great Turkish food in an intimate setting.

Drinking & Entertainment

Some of the best spots for a few pints are in Broughty Ferry. In Dundee, the Jute Café-Bar and Het Theatre Café are also relaxed places to sip a glass of something.

our pick **Fisherman's Tavern** (☎ 775941; 12 Fort St, Broughty Ferry) This community pub serves good cask ales and is a terrific little nook-and-cranny pub; once you order a drink you won't want to leave. There's also a beer garden, scene of a rowdy and thoroughly enjoyable beer festival every June, the proceeds of which go to the local lifeboat association.

Doghouse (☎ 227080; 13 Brown St; admission £3-15; 🕒 7pm-2am) This big, tall barn of a bar, Dundee's alternative headquarters and best venue for live music, is a great place to go. Dark, spacious, and atmospheric, there's live music – mostly rock – every weekend, and well-attended comedy nights on Monday. There are pool tables, a long bar, good crack, and also a few tables outdoors.

Ship Inn (☎ 779176; 121 Fisher St, Broughty Ferry) Located on the seafront, this cabin-style wooden pub is small, intimate, and full of nautical fittings. It does fine bar meals; it's very cosy, and you can look out across the Firth of Tay, and see the local lifeboats launching for drills or rescues.

Reading Rooms (☎ 0790 535 3301; www.thereadingrooms.co.uk; 57 Blackscroft; cover £2-5; 🕒 10.30pm-2.30am Wed-Sun) Some of Scotland's best club nights, as well as regular live music, take place in this innovative venue. You can hear everything from big band and jazz to punk and the latest electronic sounds. Check the website for upcoming events.

Getting There & Away

If you're driving over the Tay Rd Bridge from Fife, it's toll-free in that direction only; leaving Dundee it costs 80p (a longstanding joke is that otherwise nobody would live there!).

AIR

The **airport** (☎ 643242; Riverside Dr) is roughly 1.5 miles west of the centre; daily flights head to London City Airport with **ScotAirways** (☎ 0870 606 0707; www.scotairways.co.uk).

BUS

There are Citylink services to/from Edinburgh (£9, two hours, hourly), Glasgow (£9.40, 2¼ hours, hourly), Perth (£4.20, 35 minutes, half-hourly) and Aberdeen (£9.40, two hours, more than hourly).

TRAIN

There is no shortage of services from Edinburgh (£17.40, 1¼ hours, one or two hourly) and Glasgow (£19.60, 1½ hours, at least hourly). Trains for Aberdeen (£20.70, 1¼ hours, two hourly) run via Arbroath and Stonehaven.

AROUND DUNDEE

Glamis Castle

Looking every bit a Scottish castle, with turrets and battlements, **Glamis Castle** (Glarms; ☎ 01307-840393; adult/child castle & grounds £7.30/4.10, grounds only £3.70/2.70; 🕒 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Dec; ♿ grounds only) was the legendary setting for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Grampians and an extensive park provide a spectacular backdrop for this family home of the Earls of Strathmore and Kinghorne. The daughter of one of the earls, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, better known as the Queen Mother, grew up here.

Entry is by guided tour, and the guides do a good job of making them interesting for children; last admission is at 4.30pm and only the grounds have disabled access. The most impressive room is the drawing room, with its arched plasterwork ceiling, while the frescoes on the roof of the chapel (haunted, naturally) are magnificent. There's a display of armour and weaponry in the crypt (also haunted).

The castle is 12 miles north of Dundee in the village of Glamis. There are Strathtay Scottish buses from Dundee (35 minutes, one to three daily) to the castle itself, and a couple more that stop in the adjacent village. The Dundee tourist office has a leaflet on reaching the castle by bus.

ARBROATH

☎ 01241 / pop 22,800

Arbroath is one of those Scottish coastal towns that seems to change mood according to the weather. When the sun shines, it's a great place for a day out, especially for fans of smoked fish – the famous Arbroath smokie (haddock) is a real delicacy. The town also takes great pride in its football team, world record holders from the day in 1885 when they beat hapless Bon Accord 36-0. The **tourist office** (☎ 872609; Market Pl; ⌚ daily Jun-Aug, Mon-Sat Sep-May) is worth visiting.

The town was established as a fishing port in the 12th century, and the settlement grew up around **Arbroath Abbey** (HS; ☎ 878756; adult/child £4/1.60; ⌚ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿ almost all). King William the Lion, who is buried here, founded the abbey in 1178. It was at the abbey where Robert the Bruce signed Scotland's famous declaration of independence from England in 1320, which contained the oft-quoted words: 'It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom'. Closed following the Dissolution, the fortified abbey fell into ruin but enough survives to make this a very impressive sight. The **visitors centre** next door outlines the turbulent history of the abbey, as well as providing a good virtual tour of how it might have looked in its prime. It makes a laudable effort to provide accessible information for kids too.

Harbour Nights Guesthouse (☎ 434343; www.harbournights-scotland.com; 4 Shore; s/d from £40/45) is right on Arbroath harbour and is a very appealing place to stay. It's a stylish place of some character, and offers handsome themed rooms, the best of which overlook the harbour (doubles £55 to £65). Breakfast is also a cut above the average.

The **Old Brewhouse** (☎ 879945; 3 High St; mains £5-9; ⌚ lunch & dinner) is a pub right on the harbour wall, a perfect place to try a smokie, which is very tasty here. There's cosy indoor seating, tables outside for a sunny day and the addictive Orkney Dark Island on tap.

Strathtay Scottish has buses from Dundee (45 minutes, frequent), as does Citylink from Edinburgh/Glasgow. However, the scenic trip along the coast from Dundee (20 minutes, up to three an hour) makes the train journey worthwhile.

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The Channel Islands

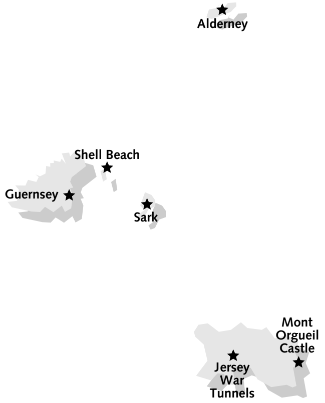
The Fates were having a good day when they created the Channel Islands. These slabs of granite, sliced from the French mainland and scattered artfully into the sea, are full of mild adventures and small discoveries. With exquisite coastlines, beautiful harbours and forgotten, shaded lanes, their quirky anachronisms will keep you puzzled and entertained for hours. In places just 8 miles from France, there's a vaguely tropical feel here. Life is lived at a slower pace, tides and fog affect schedules, and plans sometimes just have to change – giving travels a gently random flavour. And there's a sense of uniqueness; partly the French–English cultural blend, but also something genuinely distinct. It shows itself in a host of individual surprises, from car number plates to car bans – all played out in pockets of bucolic idyll.

Though British, the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey are fiercely independent and administered locally; the latter includes the smaller islands of Alderney, Sark and Herm. Jersey and Guernsey, the largest and most accessible islands, specialise in excellent seafood and glorious coastal walks. Their holiday worlds are slowly evolving from bucket and spade towards latte and spa, but even here a genteel calm often prevails. The three smaller islands, determinedly idiosyncratic and seemingly frozen at different points in time, add another layer of complexity to explore.

And for islands so small there's a surprising amount to discover. Surf pounding seas, kayak tranquil coves, tackle testing 30-mile hikes, languish in luxury spas and indulge in seriously good food; all this awaits – even though the biggest island is only 9 miles long. And perhaps because of their size there's a sense of really getting to know them; it's as if someone's let you in on a great secret. Be warned – once tasted, these islands can become gently addictive.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cycling by moonlight in car-free, care-free, magical **Sark** (p947)
- Feasting on fresh-caught crab and local lobster in Guernsey's tempting, top-notch **restaurants** (p945)
- Evoking the WWII Occupation at the chilling **Jersey War Tunnels** (p943)
- Swimming off the exquisite white, warm and sandy **Shell Beach** (p946) at Herm
- Pointing at puffins and gandering at gannets as you bob on a boat around remote **Alderney** (p946)
- Experiencing medieval mayhem at Jersey's hugely imaginative **Mont Orgueil Castle** (p943)



- POPULATION: 151,562
- AREA: 120 SQ MILES

History

The Channel Islands are rich in archaeological sites from the Stone Age onwards. The Romans used the islands as trading posts, and they were part of Normandy until 1066, only becoming English when William of Normandy (aka 'William the Conqueror') was crowned king. For centuries the islands were used as sparring grounds, but in 1483 England and France agreed that the territory would remain neutral in the event of war.

Then, in 1939, this happy-go-lucky resort suddenly found itself the only British soil to be occupied by German forces during WWII. This incredibly harsh period of Channel Islands history can be seen in numerous, poignant sites, including the many highly visible German fortifications. The postwar years have seen the fishing, tourism and farming industries decrease, to be replaced by the big bucks of offshore banking. Finance houses have replaced greenhouses, and today the sector employs the biggest chunk of the workforce.

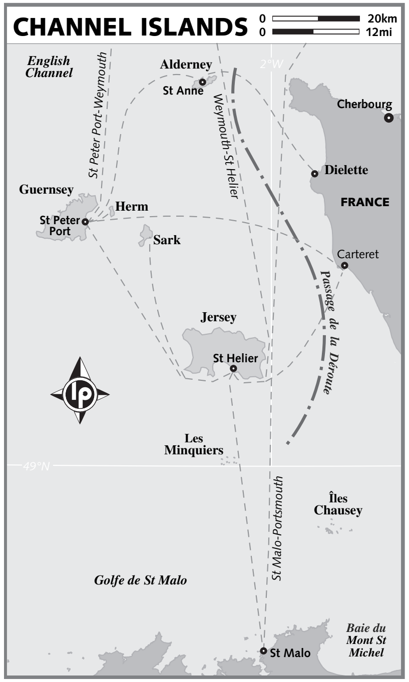
Getting There & Away

AIR

Jersey and Guernsey are the main points of entry. Return-trip fares vary wildly between £70 and £300 – shop around.

Air Southwest (☎ 0870 241 8202; www.airsouthwest.com) flies from Jersey to Plymouth and Bristol. **Aurigny Air Services** (☎ 0871 8710717; www.aurigny.com) links Guernsey with Bristol, London Stansted, London Gatwick, Manchester and Dinard. It also connects Alderney with Southampton and runs frequent interisland services.

Blue Islands (☎ 01481-727567; www.blueislands.com) flies from Bournemouth, Brighton, France and the Isle of Man and between islands. **bmibaby** (☎ 0871 224 0 224; www.bmibaby.com) connects Jersey with Cardiff, the East Midlands airport, Edinburgh and Manchester.



British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9 850; www.ba.com) links Jersey with London Gatwick and Manchester. **Flybe** (☎ 0871 700 0535, calls per min 10p; www.flybe.com) connects Jersey/Guernsey and Belfast, Birmingham, Dublin, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, London and Southampton.

BOAT

Condor Ferries (☎ 0870 243 5140; www.condorferries.com) runs daily fast ferries (two to 2½ hours) to/from Poole and Weymouth. Return fares start at £90 for a foot passenger, £250 for a car and driver. There's also a slow daily ferry from Portsmouth to Guernsey (seven hours there, 13 hours back) and Jersey (10 hours), for similar fares.

Condor sails daily to St Malo in France from Guernsey (return foot passenger £40, car and two adults £95, 1¾ hours), and between Guernsey and Jersey (£25 return, one hour).

Manche Iles Express (☎ 01481-701 316; www.manche-iles-express.com) links the islands with France and runs regular interisland services for foot passengers – including useful Guernsey/Alderney and Jersey/Sark connections (all routes one way £20 to £30, around one hour).

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

The Channel Islands have the kind of low tax rates (20%) that make mainlanders weep, and no Value Added Tax (VAT). They print their own version of the British pound – you can't use it on the mainland, but you can use British money on the islands. Posting mail requires local stamps and, not being in the UK, the islands have complex health arrangements – making private cover advisable.

Self governing, the Channel Islands are not part of the EU and really only rely on the UK for defence; laws passed in London have no automatic force. The islands also have their own languages: Jerriais and Guernesiais – which borrow heavily from Normandy French. Spoken by a small number of islanders today, the dialect's legacy lingers in the local pronunciation of what visitors expect to be French sounding locations. Sometimes anglicised, sometimes not – try applying a Parisian accent to Jersey and Guernsey street names, and see the smiles in response.

JERSEY

☎ 01534 / pop 88,200

Jersey is the biggest, and its rivals would say brashest, of the Channel Islands. Its capital, St Helier, does have more than a whiff of the offshore finance centre it is – think shimmering steel and glass, and pinstripe suits. But the island is also much more; its coast alone is 48 miles long. Exquisite swaths of sandy beach fringe the south, east and west sides, rugged cliffs – good for walking and cycling – frame the north, and countless tranquil lanes lie in between. Its richly textured history is also brought to life by a clutch of excellent museums.

Orientation & Information

Measuring 9 miles by 5, Jersey is roughly rectangular in shape; St Helier sits on the south at the eastern side of the wide sweep of St Aubin's Bay. At the bay's western edge lies St Aubin itself, a harbour village and a recommended base, with its attractive string of seafood restaurants. The miniport of Gorey clings to the island's eastern tip.

Jersey Tourism (☎ 448800; www.jersey.com; Liberation Sq, St Helier; ⏰ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 9am-1pm Sat Oct-Apr, 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun, 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 8.30am-2.15pm Sun Jun-Oct) is opposite the bus station, a short walk from the ferry terminal.

usetheinternet (☎ 768879; 9 Charing Cross, St Helier; per 15min £1; ⏰ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) is a few minutes' walk behind the tourist office.

Sights & Activities

Formerly called Jersey Zoo, **Durrell** (☎ 860000; www.durrellwildlife.org; Les Augrés Manor, Trinity; adult/child £11.50/7.40; ⏰ 9.30am-dusk) is an inspiring place, far from the cooped-up misery of many of its counterparts. Founded by writer and naturalist Gerald Durrell, it focuses firmly on breeding endangered species then releasing them into the wild. The layout allows inhabitants remarkable freedom, with monkeys and lemurs roaming a natural, wooded environment. The talks given by enthusiastic keepers are recommended. Take bus 3A, 3B or 23 from the bus station.

The profound impact that the German Occupation had on thousands of individual worlds is told in the **Jersey War Tunnels** (☎ 860808; www.jerseywartunnels.com; Les Charrières Malorey, St Lawrence; adult/child £9/5; ⏰ 10am-6pm mid-Feb–late Dec, last admission 4.30pm). Here flickering film footage and personal testimonies fill the chilling kilometre-long passages of a former underground military hospital, hacked out of solid rock by forced labour. The tales are of personal courage, resistance, endurance and – sometimes – collaboration. Your ticket, in the form of an islander's identity card, means you find out more about the person you 'were'. History made human, it makes you ask what would you have done, and then – are you sure? Take bus 8A.

Perched high above the small port of Gorey, **Mont Orgueil Castle** (☎ 853292; www.jerseyheritagetrust.org; adult/child £6/5.20; ⏰ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-dusk Fri-Mon Nov-Mar) is a fairy-tale tumbling of defensive styles which has undergone a remarkably imaginative restoration. Catapults, artefacts and thought-provoking artwork lurk amid dark corners, tiny alleyways and stone spiral staircases. It's a wonderful place to duck, twist, learn and marvel. If you have children, great. If you don't, become one again for a few hours. Bus 1 goes to the castle.

Jersey's **Maritime Museum** (☎ 811043; New North Quay, St Helier; adult/child £6/5.20; ⏰ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) is an interactive, whirling, lever-pulling delight. Here you build boats, change the wind direction, make waves and generally play at being King Knut. There are conventional exhibits too, but largely this is excellent education, by stealth.

On the wild, west coast, the 5-mile sandy beach at **St Ouen's Bay** is mind-expandingly big and backed by wind-sculpted dunes. **Pure Adventure** (☎ 769165; www.purejersey.com) offers sea-kayaking and land-yachting (two hours £35), while **Jersey Surf School** (☎ 484005; www.cisurf.com; Watersplash, St Ouen's Bay; wetsuit & board hire per

2hr £10-15) does classes and equipment hire. Or hunt out **Le Pinacle**, in the northwest. Stone Age quarry and Roman shrine, what really catches the eye here is the rock outcrop: pointy and made of pink granite, it's seen, somewhat inevitably, as a fertility symbol.

Sleeping & Eating

Jersey Tourism operates a free reservations service, **Jerseylink** (☎ 448888). Book ahead in summer.

Rose Farm Camping (☎ 741231; La Rue de la Pigeonnerie; tent site & 2 adults from £17; Ⓟ 💻 🏊) A pretty, hilltop site with all the mod cons, half a mile from St Aubin.

Harbour View (☎ 741585; www.harbourviewjersey.com; Le Blvd, St Aubin; s/d £43/78; 🕒 Mar-Oct) Stylish design, comfy leather sofas and a family atmosphere combine in an ivy-covered B&B on St Aubin's harbourfront. Great value.

our pick Old Court House Inn (☎ 746433; www.oldcourthousejersey.com; Le Blvd, St Aubin's Harbour; s/d/ste £80/120/170) This 15th-century place oozes character and charm; here it's all low lintels and twisting staircases. Next to the water, the atmospheric rooms have stunning views, and the courtyard restaurant and schooner-shaped bar – made from old ship timbers – do first-class food (mains £15).

Longueville Manor (☎ 725501; www.longuevillemanor.com; Longueville Rd, St Saviour; s/d/ste from £205/260/530; Ⓟ 🏊) Longueville is a stately Norman manor house, replete with warm stone, plush furnishings and rich woods. Exuding luxury, some suites have flat-screen TVs in the bathrooms, with fresh flowers and homemade shortbread in the rooms. With a top-notch restaurant (mains £30), it's a mile from St Helier.

Boathouse (☎ 744226; 1 North Quay, St Aubin; 🕒 bar lunch & dinner, restaurant closed lunch Sat & Mon) Two storeys of timber and gleaming glass directly overlooking St Aubin's Bay. With bar meals downstairs (mains £9), restaurant upstairs (mains £16), this is super-stylish but still simple dining.

Museum Brasserie (☎ 510069; The Weighbridge, St Helier; mains £8.50-11.50; 🕒 lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) Attached to Jersey Museum, spilling into a delightful courtyard and great for fresh fish.

Suma's (☎ 853291; Gorey Hill, Gorey; mains around £19; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Small, smart and pale blue, Suma's does good Mediterranean-influenced food. Its little terrace overlooks Gorey Harbour.

Alternatively, stock up at St Helier's central and fish **markets** (Halkett Pl; 🕒 7.30am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Thu), grab a portable barbecue and do what the locals do – head to the sands of St Ouen's Bay to watch the sun go down.

Getting There & Around

For information on getting to Jersey, see p942.

A taxi from the airport to St Helier costs around £8 (20 minutes). The Airport–St Aubin–St Helier bus 15 costs £1.60 (15 to 45 minutes). All bus routes on the island – including those to the sights – originate at St Helier's harbourside bus station. Useful routes include bus 1 to Gorey and 12a to St Ouen's Bay (fares 90p to £1.60).

Traffic is heavy. **Aardvark/Zebra** (☎ 736556; www.zebrahire.com; 9 Esplanade, St Helier), in the centre of town, hires cars (per day £30) and bikes (per day £10). **Jersey Cycletours** (☎ 482898; Corbiere Walk; per day £11) is in St Aubin.

GUERNSEY

☎ 01481 / pop 60,285

At times being in Guernsey is like falling into a giant flowerbox – everything's in bloom. With a subtropical feel, the highly picturesque capital, St Peter Port, has narrow cobblestone streets winding up and down steep hills to the water's edge, where rafts of colourful yachts pack the harbours. A little further out, a seafront rash of development has left its mark, and many locals worry that the island's character is being eroded. But Guernsey's chief appeal – its knack of conjuring halcyon days from green lanes and coastal fringes, where hiking the cliffs reveals dramatic scenery and gentle crescents of beach – remains.

Orientation & Information

Guernsey is roughly 7 miles long by 5 miles wide. St Peter Port, or 'town', lies on its eastern edge. The south coast is steeper, with leg-testing cliff paths; land on the west and north slopes more gently towards the sea. The Bailiwick of Guernsey includes the smaller islands of Herm, Sark and Alderney.

The helpful **Guernsey Tourist Board** (☎ 723552; www.visitguernsey.com; North Plantation, St Peter Port; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat Nov-Mar) is on the waterfront, and there's an information desk at the airport. There's no internet café on the island, but the tourist office provides 10 minutes' free internet access.

Sights & Activities

Of numerous appealing beaches, **Cobo** is recommended for surfing, northern **Pembroke** for family fun.

After being exiled from France in 1851 following Napoleon III's coup, Victor Hugo lived in St Peter Port for 14 years. His home, **Hauteville House** (☎ 721911; www.victorhugo.gg; 38 Hauteville; adult/child £5/free, guided tour only; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug), imprinted with his larger-than-life personality, has been preserved. It's all do-it-yourself opulence; Hugo gleefully searched out mundane objects to create a quirky interior world – check out the candelabra made of bobbins. Standing at his desk in the rooftop glass lookout where he wrote *Les Misérables*, on a clear day you can see France.

The tunnel network of Guernsey's **German Military Underground Hospital** (☎ 239100; La Vassalerie Rd, St Andrews; adult/child £3.50/1; 🕒 2-3pm Sun & Thu Mar & Nov, 2-4pm Apr & Oct, 10am-noon & 2-4pm May-Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm Jul & Aug) has been left void and its frightening, echoing emptiness evokes the enforced labourers who died building it, and the German soldiers treated here. Outside, a display of 1940s newspapers and posters highlights the Occupation's overarching impact. Many speak volumes; one announces the execution of an islander for sending a carrier pigeon to England. With dripping, dank walls and vanishing corridors, this is a horrible place telling a horrible story – a compelling reason to visit. Take bus 4 or 5.

On the west coast, the **Shipwreck Museum** (☎ 265036; Fort Grey, Rocquaine Coast Rd, St Peters; adult/child £2.50/free; 🕒 10am-5pm mid-Apr–Oct), is housed in an 1804 Martello (defensive) tower. Circular and pocket-sized, it still manages to cram in a wealth of detail about the incredibly hazardous local waters, and the ships and countless lives lost. Bus 7 runs to the museum.

If waiting for an interisland boat, join the locals at the rock-sculpted **bathing pools**, just south of St Peter Port harbour; hunt out a proper **Guernsey Jumper** (special pattern, special wool) in the shops in town; or get the key to **Victoria Tower** from **Guernsey Museum** (☎ 726518; Candie Gardens, St Peter Port; 🕒 10am-4pm or 5pm). Curiously crenellated, the top affords the best view on the island.

Sleeping

Le Friquet (☎ 256509; www.lefriquethotel.com; Rue de Friquet, Castel; s/d/ste £49.50/92/120; Ⓟ ⊠ 🏊) A secret-garden getaway and old restored farmhouse with flagstone floors and exposed beams. Towards the middle of the island, the peaceful grounds are ideal for its renowned Sunday dinners. Catch bus 2 or the hotel can arrange bargain car hire for £10 a day.

Old Government House Hotel (☎ 724921; www.theoghhotel.com; St Ann's Pl, St Peter Port; s/d/ste £125/185/215; Ⓟ 🏊 ♿) Known locally as simply 'OGH', this is the kind of place where everything seems monogrammed. Formerly the official residence of the Guernsey governors, it's now a grand hotel; sparkling with marble and chandeliers. Lovely views of the harbour, Herm and Sark. It has a superswish spa too.

Eating

Surrounded by sea life, almost close enough to France to smell the cooking, with stunning views and nestling in the heart of tax havens – little wonder restaurants in the Channel Islands are a delight. And Guernsey somehow pulls off the best blend. Here seriously stylish lobster-laden menus sit alongside some of the freshest – and cheapest – seafood sarnies around.

La Crêperie (☎ 725566; 18 Smith St, St Peter Port; crepes £6; 🕒 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) Bustling, with tiny tables, great galettes and superdry Breton cider. This close to France, it would be rude not to indulge.

Da Nello (☎ 721552; 46 Le Pollet, St Peter Port; mains £13; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Nello has been satisfying islanders' pasta appetites since 1978. Cosy ambience, soft lighting, excellent food. The lobster linguini is legendary.

La Frégate (☎ 724624; Les Cotils; St Peter Port; mains £15; 🕒 lunch & dinner) On a hill above town, this stylish place has superb, simply prepared food and panoramic views. The three-course meals (lunch/dinner £18/26.50) are good value.

Beach kiosks, generally open daily in summer, are a definitive slice of laid-back island life. Look out for local crab rolls and homemade Guernsey Gâche (pronounced 'gosh'), a kind of teacake. Favourites include Portelet, Rousse and Petit Bôt kiosks, and Chouet Tea Rooms.

Getting There & Around

For information on getting to Guernsey, see p942.

A taxi from the airport to St Peter Port takes about 15 minutes (£9). The bus (20 minutes) stops at the main, harbour-side station in town, where all services start (any journey

60p). **Value Rent-a-Car** (☎ 243547; www.valuerentacar.co.uk; per day £30) has outlets at the airport and harbour. **Electra Bike Hire** (☎ 726926; www.electra.org.uk; North Plantation, St Peter Port; per day £6) is near the tourist office, while **Millard & Co** (☎ 720777; www.millards.org; Victoria Rd, St Peter Port; per day £26) hires scooters.

Bus 7, with its round-island, coastal route (60p per trip), is ideal for mini-explorations; see somewhere appealing, hop off, swim, hop on another – sooner or later you'll end up where you started.

HERM

☎ 01481 / pop 97

A 20-minute boat trip from Guernsey, Herm is a pretty island of white beaches and flower-strewn hills. It is a world in miniature (1.5 miles long and half a mile wide), totally geared up for the waves of holidaymakers landing on its shores; and at times can seem a little contrived. But once you're past the initial crowds it's still possible to luxuriate in its wheel-free atmosphere: no cars, motorcycles or even bicycles are allowed. Walking its circumference is an extremely pleasant way to spend a couple of hours.

The island has been overseen by the same family since 1949, but previous occupants included a Prussian count, who tried to establish a wallaby population, and Compton MacKenzie, author of *Whiskey Galore*. Today most people make a coast path beeline for **Shell Beach**, an undeniably beautiful spot for a swim, but it's also worth hunting out the remains of **Neolithic tombs** at the Common and the 10th-century **St Tugual's Chapel** in the centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Self-catering accommodation and camping are booked through the island's **administration office** (☎ 722377; www.herm-island.com; tent site & 2 adults 1st night £17.30 then £10.80, high-season cottages per week from £600), which also cashes cheques.

White House Hotel (☎ 722159; www.herm-island.com; s/d half-board £85/170; 🏊) Upmarket, fairly formal, and appealing to a sedate crowd, this hotel's tranquil garden and rooms overlook the bay, giving superb views. The terraced restaurant does decent pub grub (mains £7).

Mermaid Tavern (☎ 710170; mains from £7; 🕓 lunch & dinner) Creaking with nauticalia, but somehow still not tacky. A lively atmosphere and a large, noisy courtyard.

The island has two beach kiosks.

Getting There & Away

Travel Trident (☎ 721379) runs ferries to Herm from Guernsey (adult/child return £8.50/4.25, 20 minutes, six to eight daily from April to October). From November to March there are three return sailings on Wednesday and Saturday, only when the pub is open.

ALDERNEY

☎ 01481 / pop 2400

Alderney is the third largest of the Channel Islands and is the closest to France, which is clearly visible only 8 miles away. Unlike its neighbours, as the Germans swept ever closer during WWII, virtually the whole population of Alderney opted to leave. The island was effectively turned into a forced labour camp; an estimated 6000 men endured terrible conditions, hundreds died. The fortifications, sobering on all the islands, have a particular resonance here. At times eerie, but also vibrant and undoubtedly beautiful, today it's home to a close-knit but friendly community – most evident in the cosy pubs at the end of the day.

A good time to visit is the first week in August, when the carnival and mayhem of **Alderney Week** takes place (but book ahead).

Orientation & Information

St Anne is the pastel-painted, village-sized capital, with winding, cobbled streets, 15 minutes' walk from the airport. The port, Braye Harbour, is a similar distance north. The island has two ATMs.

Alderney Tourism (☎ 823737; www.alderney.net; Victoria St; 🕓 10am-noon & 2-4pm, closed Sun afternoon) shares an office with Alderney Wildlife Trust.

Sights & Activities

Alderney Wildlife Trust (☎ 822935; Victoria St) can advise on guided walks, the island's winsome blonde hedgehog, and gannet and puffin colonies, all of which can be seen on a recommended two-hour, round-island boat trip (£12); get tickets at **McAllister's Fish Shop** (☎ 823666; Victoria St).

St Anne has a friendly **museum** (☎ 823222; 🕓 10am-noon daily & 2-4pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct) with local history exhibits, relics of the Occupation and finds from an Elizabethan wreck.

Sleeping

Essex Lodge (☎ 823557; Longis Bay; s £30-45, d £60-90) Elegant, with deft touches, this former barracks has been sensitively converted to a classy guesthouse. Some rooms have tiny terraces overlooking a golden sweep of bay. It's remote, so a bike is handy.

St Anne's (☎ 823145; ingridmurdoch@hotmail.com; 10 Le Huret, St Anne; s/d £35/70) A fabulous guesthouse in the heart of town – enough old, twiddly bits for character, enough mod cons to be comfortable. Ingrid, the owner, volunteers at the tourist office and is a mine of information.

Eating & Drinking

Marais Hall (☎ 822683; Marais Sq, St Anne; mains from £7; 🕓 lunch & dinner) Good-value food at one of the island's oldest pubs. Eat in the restaurant or the bar, and feel welcome either way. The homemade fish pie is superb.

First & Last (☎ 823162; Braye St, Harbourside; mains £16; 🕓 dinner Tue-Sat) A local favourite, with blue-and-white-checked tablecloths and a fishy theme, reflected in décor and menu. Try the excellent bouillabaisse.

Getting There & Around

Aurigny and Blue Islands fly to Alderney from Bournemouth, Brighton, Guernsey, Jersey and Southampton, see p942. Manche Iles Express runs regular ferries from France via Guernsey, see p943, but these have been subject to change – check with the tourist office.

Braye Hire Cars (☎ 823881; per day £24) will deliver to the airport or harbour. **Pedal Power** (☎ 822286; Les Rocquettes, St Anne; per day £6) rents out bikes. For a taxi, call ☎ 823760.

SARK

☎ 01481 / pop 580

Traffic-free Sark is small in size, big on anachronisms. The only engines here are attached to tractors; horses and carts are a picturesque means of travel for many visitors, the rest walk or cycle. It's also streetlight free, and cycling the dark paths at night is utterly magical – but bring a torch. With a deeply crinkled coastline, the island stretches 40 miles of cliffs and beaches from its compact dimensions: 3 miles long and 1.5 miles wide. Seemingly lost lanes, extraordinary views and a tangible sense of freedom make it reminiscent of childhood holidays you possibly never actually had; it is one of the most memorable of the islands.

Sark's system of government has long had more than a few feudal overtones, but these days the 'ruler', the Seigneur, is more a Lord of the Manor figure. But enough glorious idiosyncrasies remain: only the Seigneur can keep pigeons, and road signs measure distances in 'minutes to walk', not miles.

Orientation & Information

Steep-sided, the island is divided into Sark and Little Sark, and is linked by the isthmus La Coupée. The Avenue, the main concentration of shops, is 15-minutes' walk from the harbour, and is home to **Sark Tourism** (☎ 832345; www.sark.info; 🕓 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11.15am-1.15pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Aug, 10am-2pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar).

There is no ATM. The NatWest and HSBC banks (both open 10am to 3pm Monday to Friday) take an hour off for lunch. You can withdraw cash with your purchases from Island Stores.

Sights & Activities

La Coupée forms a razor-edged path with a precipitous approach and vertiginous 100m drop; cyclists and carriage riders have to dismount before crossing.

The deeply aquamarine **Venus Pool**, a so-big-you-can-swim-in-it rock pool, can be found, at low tide only, on Little Sark's southern tip. For three hours of enthusiastic stories join George, a former fisherman, on a **round-island trip** (☎ 832107; trips adult/child £20/10) in his Sark-built boat.

Sleeping & Eating

Beau Sejour (☎ 832034; www.beausejour.co.uk; Rue de la Seigneurie; s/d £32/64) This is a lovely, great-value B&B in an old granite building. The owner, Pauline, positively oozes *joie de vivre*. You can also rent the whole house (which sleeps six) and Pauline herself as your personal cook-cum-housekeeper for a bargain £230 a night.

La Sablonnerie (☎ 832061; www.lasablonnerie.com; s £51-82, d £102-164) Tucked away at the edge of Little Sark, this is a deeply comfortable converted farmhouse amid lush gardens. It has rustic yet grand rooms and a good restaurant (mains £15, open for lunch and dinner) and tea garden.

La Moinerie (☎ 832089; mains £15; 🕓 lunch & dinner, closed Mon, Sun evening) Delicious food at the foot of a typically leafy Sark lane. The huge portions of fresh fish have been caught by the owner.

Getting There & Around

Isle of Sark Shipping (☎ 724059; www.sarkshipping.info) sails from St Peter Port, Guernsey (adult/child return £22/11.20, 45 minutes), with five boats daily from April to October, and one boat Monday to Saturday between November and March. Day trips are a summer-only option. Manche Iles Express (see p943) runs frequent services between Sark and France and Jersey.

An open-sided tractor-drawn cart pulls people and luggage up the harbour hill (be warned: it's dubbed 'the toast rack') or you can walk up the signed path. Horse-drawn carriages congregate at the beginning of the Avenue, near **Avenue Cycle Hire** (☎ 832102; bike hire per day £8).

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Cumbria & the Lakes

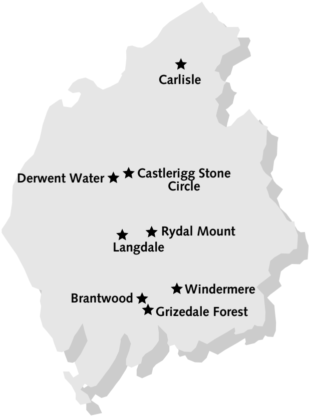
Tucked away on England's northwestern frontier overlooking the Scottish Borders, Cumbria has one of the most dramatic and varied landscapes in Britain, stretching from the lush Eden Valley in the east across the peaks and valleys of the Lake District all the way to the windswept coastline along its western shore. Formed from the old districts of Cumberland and Westmorland in 1974, this compact county is best known as the spiritual home of British hill walking: many of the country's highest peaks and most challenging hikes are crammed between its borders, acting as a magnet for rock climbers, mountain bikers and weekend walkers alike.

It's also a region that's brimming over with history and tradition: grey-slate villages, old market towns and country houses huddle in the shadow of snow-capped mountains, while crumbling castles, lonely farmsteads and slate-topped Lakeland inns are littered across the rolling fells. Cumbria is one place that's guaranteed to bring out the poet in you, and you'll certainly be in good company: this corner of England has been a favourite escape for generations of writers, artists and painters ever since the first Romantic poets arrived here in the early 19th century.

The only drawback to such a beautiful region is its inevitable popularity, and on busy summer weekends it can feel like half of Britain has decided to take to the hills around the Central Lakes; but time your visit for early spring or late autumn and you might find you have many of the county's classic trails all to your self. It's worth taking the time to explore some of Cumbria's less-visited sights, too, including the redbrick battlements of Carlisle Castle, Wordsworth's boyhood home in Cockermouth and the classic steam train journey from Ravenglass to Eskdale aboard *La'al Ratty*.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering the wild wooden sculptures of **Grizedale Forest** (p602)
- Drinking in the dramatic views from the **Langdale Valley** (p603)
- Gazing out at the English frontier from the walls of **Carlisle Castle** (p612)
- Exploring the literary landmarks of **Brantwood** (p602) and **Rydal Mount** (p599)
- Taking a leisurely cruise on the lakes of **Windermere** (p593) or **Derwent Water** (p604)
- Pondering Britain's mysterious past at **Castlerigg Stone Circle** (p606)



- POPULATION: 487,607
- AREA: 2629 SQ MILES

Activities

CYCLING

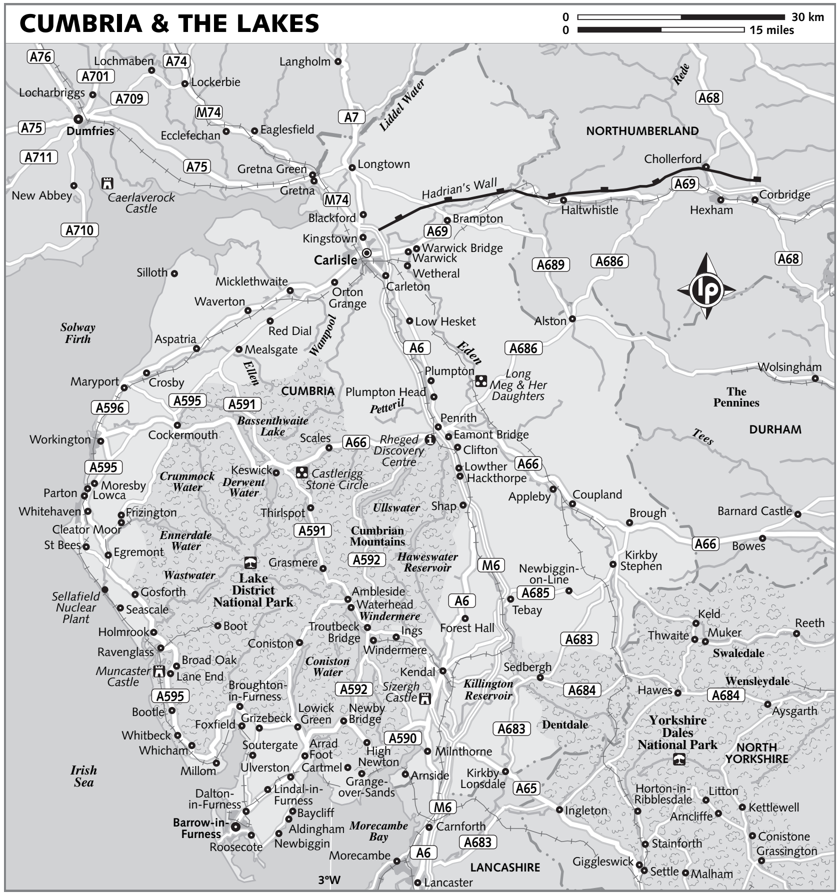
Cycling is popular in Cumbria, especially mountain biking on the fells. Cycle-hire shops are dotted across the region, and tourist offices stock a useful Cumbria cycling map showing all the best traffic-free routes. Marked trails include the 140-mile Sea to Sea Cycle Route (C2C) from Whitehaven to Newcastle via the northern Lake District, and the 259-mile circular Cumbria Cycle Way around Ulverston, Keswick and Carlisle.

WALKING

The Lake District is one of Britain's favourite hiking spots. The region is covered by a network of footpaths and walking trails, ranging from low-level rambles to full-blown mountain ascents. Guidebooks and walking maps are available at most tourist offices and bookshops, including Alfred Wainwright's classic hand-drawn, seven-volume work *A Pictorial Guide To the Lakeland Fells*.

Wainwright also dreamt up one of northern England's classic walks, the C2C, which cuts west to east from St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire, a distance of 191 miles. The Cumbrian section passes through Honister Pass, Grasmere, Patterdale, Kirkby Stephen and Shap en route to the Yorkshire Dales, a five- to seven-day hike of 82 miles.

Door-to-door baggage services can be useful if you don't want to lug your pack along the whole route. Contact **Coast to Coast Packhorse** (☎ 017683-71689; www.cumbria.com/packhorse), **Sherpa Van** (☎ 020-8569 4101; www.sherpavan.com) or **Brigantes Baggage Couriers** (☎ 01729-830463; www.pikedaw.freeserve.co.uk/walks).


CUMBRIA & THE LAKES
0 30 km
0 15 miles
A76
Lochmaben
A74
A701
Langholm
Lockerbie
Locharbriggs
A709
M74
A75
Dumfries
A7
Ecclefechan
Eaglesfield
Liddel Water
Rede
A68
NORTHUMBERLAND
A711
A75
Gretna Green
Longtown
Chollerford
New Abbey
Caerlaverock Castle
Gretna
M74
Hadrian's Wall
A69
Corbridge
Blackford
Brampton
Haltwhistle
Hexham
A710
Kingstown
A69
Warwick Bridge
Warwick
Carlisle
A689
A686
A68
Silloth
Micklethwaite
Wetheral
Carleton
Waverton
Orton Grange
Solway Firth
Red Dial
Low Hesket
Alston
Aspatria
Wampool
Eden
A686
Mealsgate
A6
Plumpton
Long Meg & Her Daughters
Wolsingham
Maryport
Crosby
Ellen
CUMBRIA
Plumpton Head
The Pennines
A596
A595
A591
Petteril
Penrith
Bassenthwaite Lake
DURHAM
Workington
Cockermouth
Scales
A66
Rheged Discovery Centre
Eamont Bridge
Clifton
Tees
A595
Keswick
Castlerigg Stone Circle
Lowther
A66
Parton
Moresby
Crummock Water
Derwent Water
Hackthorpe
Lowca
Appleby
Coupland
Whitehaven
Frizington
Thirlspot
Ullswater
Shap
Brough
Barnard Castle
Cleator Moor
Ennerdale Water
A591
Cumbrian Mountains
A66
Bowes
St Bees
Egremont
Grasmere
A592
Haweswater Reservoir
M6
Kirkby Stephen
Wastwater
Lake District National Park
Newbiggin-on-Line
Sellafield Nuclear Plant
Gosforth
Ambleside
A685
Seascale
Waterhead
Tebay
Keld
Reeth
Windermere
A6
Holmrook
Boot
Troutbeck Bridge
Ings
Forest Hall
Thwaite
Muker
Coniston
Windermere
A683
Swaledale
Ravenglass
Broad Oak
Coniston Water
Kendal
Sedbergh
Muncaster Castle
Lane End
Killington Reservoir
Wensleydale
Broughton-in-Furness
A592
Sizergh Castle
A684
Hawes
A684
A595
Aysgarth
Bootle
Grizebeck
Lowick Green
Newby Bridge
Yorkshire Dales National Park
Foxfield
A683
Dentdale
Whitbeck
Soutergate
Arrad Foot
A590
NORTH YORKSHIRE
Whicham
Irish Sea
Millom
Ulverston
Cartmel
High Newton
Milnthorne
Arnside
Kirkby Lonsdale
Dalton-in-Furness
Lindal-in-Furness
Grange-over-Sands
A65
Horton-in-Ribblesdale
Litton
Baycliff
M6
Ingleton
Arncliffe
Kettlewell
Barrow-in-Furness
Aldingham
Morecambe Bay
Carnforth
Roosecote
Newbiggin
A683
Stainforth
Conistone
Grassington
Morecambe
A6
LANCASHIRE
Giggleswick
Settle
Malham
3°W
Lancaster

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Cumbria is a haven for adrenaline-fuelled activities ranging from rock climbing, orienteering and quad biking to the traditional sport of fell running, and newer variants such as ghyll scrambling (a cross between coasteering and river canyoning).

Sailing, kayaking and windsurfing are obviously popular too, especially around Windermere, Derwent Water and Coniston.

Check out www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk, which also publishes a useful brochure available from tourist offices.

Tours

Tailor-made holidays and specialist tours are provided by many companies.

Cloudberry Holidays (☎ 01539-733522; www.cloudberry.co.uk; Kendal) Specialist company that provides hiking trips for the YHA.

Contours (☎ 017684-80451; www.contours.co.uk) Well-organised walking-holiday provider with a selection of self-guided Cumbrian packages.

High Points (☎ 015395-30386; www.highpoints.co.uk; Newby Bridge) Outdoors centre specialising in hill walking, orienteering, climbing, ghyll scrambling and canoeing.

Knobbly Stick (☎ 01539-737576; www.knobblystick.com; Kendal) Small walking-holiday company with routes through Ullswater, Wasdale, Kendal and the Eastern Lakes.

River Deep Mountain High (☎ 015395-31116; www.rdmh.co.uk; Haverthwaite) Multi-activity company offering archery, climbing, sailing and cycling tours.

Getting There & Away

There's a direct rail link from Manchester Airport via Preston and Lancaster to Barrow-in-Furness (2½ hours) and Windermere (2¼ hours). To both Windermere and Carlisle, coaches from London take about 6½ hours, trains 3½ hours.

Getting Around

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cumbria.co.uk) provides travel information. Tourist offices stock the free *Getting Around Cumbria* booklet, with timetables for buses, trains and ferries.

BOAT

Windermere, Coniston Water, Ullswater and Derwent Water all offer ferry services, providing time-saving links for walkers. The **Cross-Lakes Shuttle** (☎ 015394-45161) runs shuttle boats and minibuses between Windermere, Esthwaite Water, Grizedale and Coniston Water; cyclists and hikers are welcome. See the Windermere & Bowness, Coniston and Keswick sections for details.

BUS

The main operator is **Stagecoach** (www.stagecoachbus.com). The Explorer ticket (one/four/seven days £8.50/19/26.50) allows unlimited travel on services in Cumbria. There are also Dayrider tickets to various districts in Cumbria, including Carlisle, Barrow and the Western, Eastern and Central Lakes.

Stagecoach operates several useful cross-county buses, including bus 555/556, (LakesLink) between Lancaster and Carlisle, which stops at all the main towns, and bus 505 (Coniston Rambler), linking Kendal, Windermere, Ambleside and Coniston.

The free *Lakesrider* booklet has comprehensive timetables.

TRAIN

Aside from the Cumbrian Coast Line and the branch spur from Oxenholme to Windermere, several steam railways chug their way around the region, including the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway (p610) and the Ambleside/Bowness to Haverthwaite Steam Railway (p594).

LAKE DISTRICT

> Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
> That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
> And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
> And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives.
>
> *William Wordsworth,* The Prelude *(1805)*

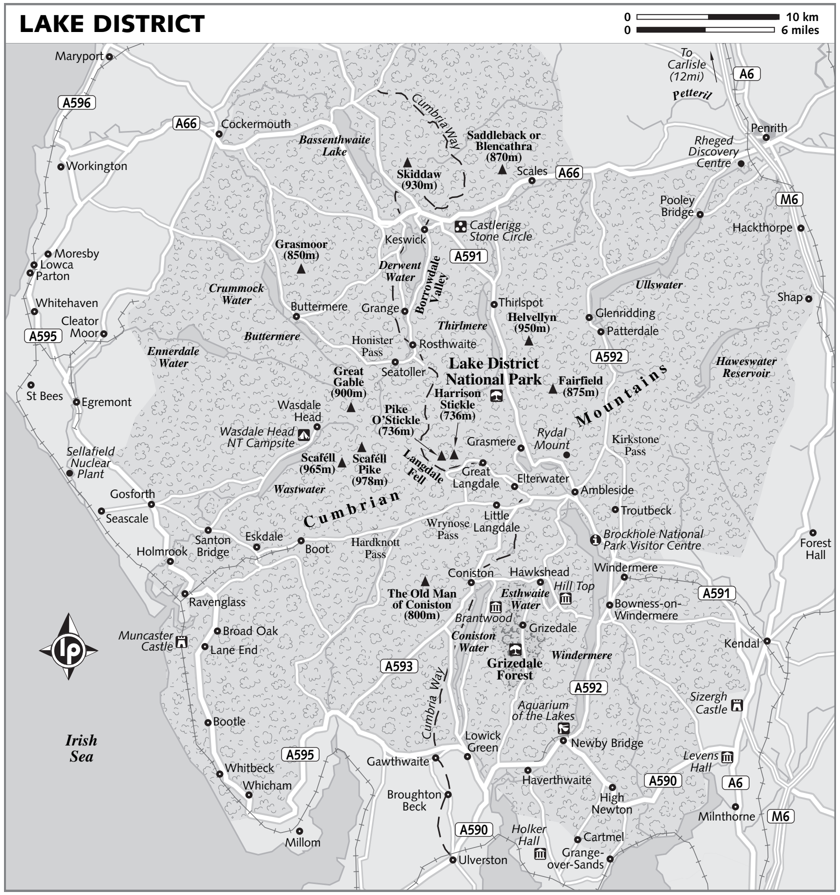
For sheer scenic splendour, few places in England can measure up to the outlandishly beautiful Lake District, where Wordsworth, Coleridge and their Romantic compatriots famously sought their poetic muse in the 19th century. The landscape of the Lakes is as breathtaking as any you'll find in Switzerland or the French Alps – a sweeping panorama of humpbacked mountains, razorblade crags and scree-covered hillsides, strewn with mountainous tarns and some of the largest natural lakes anywhere in England. With such a wealth of natural riches, it's hardly surprising that the Lake District is one of the country's favourite places for savouring the great outdoors, but there's much more to this region than fine views – it's also packed with history and culture, from the abandoned slate mines around Honister and the ruined abbey of Furness to the literary landmarks of Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount, both former homes of one William Wordsworth.

Orientation

The Lake District is shaped in a rough star formation, with valleys, ridges and lakes radiating out from the high ground at its centre. The main bases are Keswick in the north and Windermere and Bowness in the south. Ambleside and Coniston are less hectic alternatives. Windermere is the biggest, busiest lake. Ullswater, Coniston and Derwent Water lakes have a speed restriction of 10mph, and powerboats are banned on Grasmere, Crummock Water and Buttermere. Wastwater is the wildest and least accessible valley.

Information

The region's network of tourist offices stocks mountains of information on accommodation and exploring the Lake District, whether by bus, bike, or on foot. The branches in Windermere and Keswick are the most efficient, or there's a flagship **tourist office** (☎ 015394-46601; www.lake-district.gov.uk) at Brockhole, on the A591 near Windermere.



LAKE DISTRICT
0 10 km
0 6 miles
Maryport
A596
A66
Cockermouth
Workington
Bassenthwaite Lake
Cumbria Way
Saddleback or Blencathra (870m)
Skiddaw (930m)
Scales
A66
To Carlisle (12mi)
A6
Petteril
Penrith
Rheged Discovery Centre
Pooley Bridge
M6
Hackthorpe
Castlerigg Stone Circle
Keswick
A591
Moresby
Lowca
Parton
Grasmoor (850m)
Derwent Water
Borrowdale Valley
Crummock Water
Buttermere
Grange
Thirlspot
Ullswater
Glenridding
Patterdale
Shap
Whitehaven
Cleator Moor
A595
Buttermere
Thirlmere
Helvellyn (950m)
Honister Pass
Rosthwaite
Ennerdale Water
Haweswater Reservoir
Seatoller
Lake District National Park
A592
Great Gable (900m)
Fairfield (875m)
St Bees
Egremont
Harrison Stickle (736m)
Mountains
Wasdale Head
Pike O'Stickle (736m)
Rydal Mount
Wasdale Head NT Campsite
Grasmere
Kirkstone Pass
Sellafield Nuclear Plant
Scafell (965m)
Scafell Pike (978m)
Langdale Fell
Great Langdale
Elterwater
Ambleside
Wastwater
Gosforth
Cumbrian
Troutbeck
Seascale
Little Langdale
Wrynose Pass
Brockhole National Park Visitor Centre
Forest Hall
Santon Bridge
Eskdale
Holmrook
Boot
Hardknott Pass
Coniston
Hawkshead
Windermere
Hill Top
A591
Ravenglass
The Old Man of Coniston (800m)
Esthwaite Water
Brantwood
Bowness-on-Windermere
Broad Oak
Grizedale
Muncaster Castle
Lane End
Coniston Water
Grizedale Forest
Kendal
Windermere
A593
A592
Aquarium of the Lakes
Sizergh Castle
Bootle
Newby Bridge
Irish Sea
Lowick Green
A595
Levens Hall
Gawthwaite
Whitbeck
Haverthwaite
A6
Whicham
A590
Broughton Beck
High Newton
Milnthorpe
M6
Millom
A590
Holker Hall
Cartmel
Ulverston
Grange-over-Sands

Sleeping

There's more than 30 YHA hostels in the Lake District. The main point for information is **Ambleside YHA** (☎ 0870 770 5672; ambleside@yha.org.uk). Bookings for most hostels can be made direct via phone, email or the YHA reservations website (www.yhabooking.org.uk). The YHA provides a useful shuttle bus around the eight main hostels, and offers free pick-up from Windermere train station – contact Ambleside YHA for details and bookings.

Camping barns – sometimes called 'stone tents' – are run by both the National Park Authority and the YHA, costing from £6 per person per night; you need all the usual camping gear apart from a tent. Contact **Lakeland Camping Barns** (☎ 01946-758198; www.lakelandcampingbarns.co.uk) for more information.

WINDERMERE & BOWNESS

☎ 015394 / pop 8203

Framed by fells and encircled by a wooded shoreline, Lake Windermere is the largest natural lake in England, stretching in a silvery north–south line from Ambleside to Newby Bridge for a distance of some 10.5 miles. Ever since the arrival of the steam railway in 1847 – something that was passionately opposed by William Wordsworth – Windermere has served as the main gateway to the Lake District, and it remains one of the region's busiest spots. The town itself is split into two main areas – Windermere town, 1.5 miles uphill from the lake, and Bowness-on-Windermere, from where cruise boats have been chugging across the waters of the lake since the early 19th century.

Orientation

Windermere town is where you'll find the most restaurants and B&Bs, as well as the main train and bus station. The main road leads 1.5 miles downhill to Bowness, which is packed with tearooms, ice-cream shops and boat companies selling tickets for cross-lake cruises.

Information

Brockhole National Park Visitor Centre (☎ 46601; www.lake-district.gov.uk; 🕒 10am-5pm late Mar-Oct) Flagship visitor centre 3 miles north of Windermere on the A591.

Library (☎ 62400; Broad St; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Post office (21 Crescent Rd; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist offices Bowness-on-Windermere (☎ 42895; bownesstic@lake-district.gov.uk; Glebe Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Fri-Sun Nov-Mar); Windermere (☎ 46499; windermeretic@southlakeland.gov.uk; Victoria St; internet access per 10min £1; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, hours vary in winter)

Sights

Blackwell Arts & Crafts House (☎ 46139; www.blackwell.org.uk; admission £5.45; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec) is one of the finest examples of the Arts and Crafts movement, distinguished by its simple, elegant architecture and sense of space. The house was designed by Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott in the 19th century for a wealthy brewer, and contains many of his trademark designs, including Delft tiles and some gorgeous 18th-century oak panelling. A collection of antiques and furniture from the Arts and Crafts movement is also on display.

The **Windermere Steamboat Museum** (☎ 45565; www.steamboat.co.uk; Rayrigg Rd; admission £3.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Jul–mid-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Jun & mid-Sep–Nov) will delight closet steamboat Willies, with a marvellous collection of vessels including Beatrix Potter's rowing boat and the *Esperance,* which doubled as Captain Flint's houseboat in the BBC adaptation of *Swallows and Amazons*. The museum offers lake trips on vintage boats (£5.50) from July to September.

Tucked away off Lake Road, the **World of Beatrix Potter** (☎ 88444; www.hop-skip-jump.com; adult/child £6/3; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Mar) is always packed with Beatrix Potter enthusiasts of all ages, as well as an astonishing number of camera-toting Japanese tourists. Various scenes from Potter's books are brought to life inside, including Peter Rabbit's garden and Mr McGregor's greenhouse, and there's a shop with enough Potter-themed memorabilia to satisfy even the most ardent fan.

Aquarium of the Lakes (☎ 015395-30153; www.aquariumofthelakes.co.uk; Lakeside, Newby Bridge; admission £7; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Mar), at the lake's southern end, re-creates more than 30 freshwater habitats, including an underwater tunnel through the lakebed, complete with pike, Arctic char and diving ducks. As usual, though, the mischievous otters steal the show. The best way to arrive is by boat from Bowness or Ambleside (see p594), or there are regular buses to Newby Bridge, a mile from the aquarium.

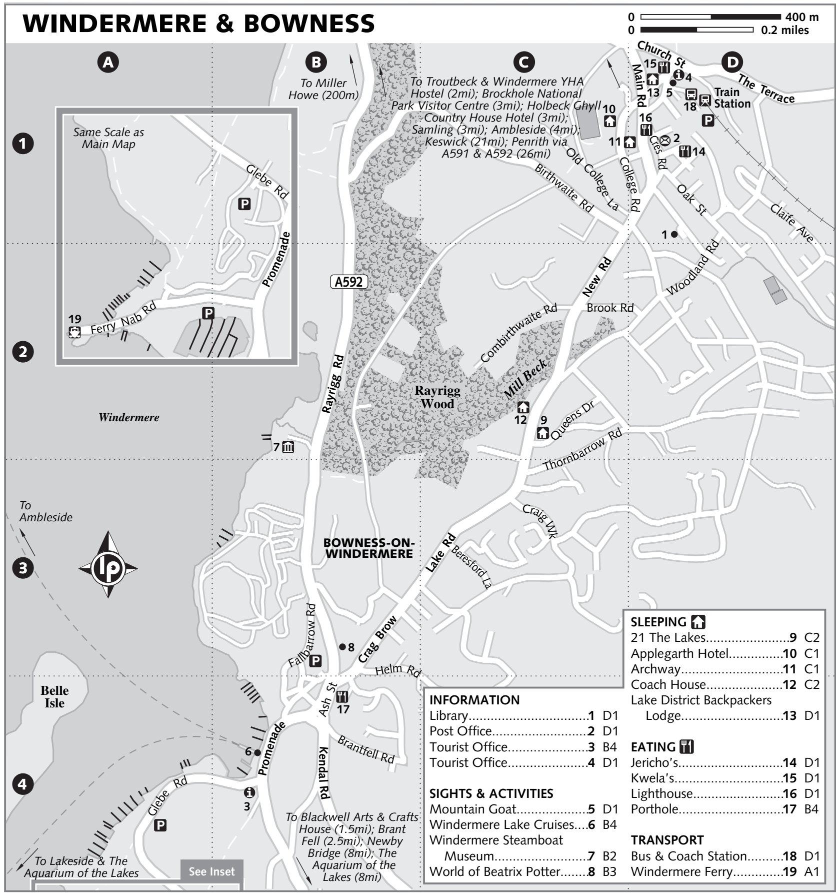
Activities

Somewhat bizarrely, Lake Windermere is officially a public highway, and in the early 19th century cargo ships carrying coal, lumber, copper and slate were a common sight on its waters. The first steam passenger ferry was launched on the lake in 1845, and lake cruises quickly became one of the town's biggest earners.

Windermere Lake Cruises (☎ 015395-31188; www.windermere-lakecruises.co.uk) offers trips on both modern launches and a couple of period beauties dating back to the 1930s. Regular colour-coded cruises depart from Bowness Pier. The Yellow Cruise runs to Lakeside and back (£7.60 return, hourly), while the Red Cruise runs to Ambleside (£5.50 return, half-hourly). The Blue Cruise offers a leisurely 45-minute cruise around the lake's shoreline and bays (£5.50 return, half-hourly). There are also launch services to Brockhole, Waterhead, Fell Foot and Ferry Landing, from where a shuttle bus departs to Beatrix Potter's cottage at Hill Top and Hawkshead in summer. A Freedom of the Lakes ticket allows unlimited cruises (one/three days £13.25/24).

Joint tickets tie in with the **Ambleside/Bowness to Haverthwaite Steam Railway** (☎ 015395-31594; return from Bowness £12, from Ambleside £16.50; 🕑 Apr-Oct) and the **Aquarium of the Lakes** (return ferry & aquarium from Bowness £13.10, from Ambleside £18.75).

You can hire open-/closed-top boats (£14/16) from beside the tourist office on Bowness Pier.


WINDERMERE & BOWNESS
0 400 m
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A
B
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D
1
2
3
4
To Miller Howe (200m)
To Troutbeck & Windermere YHA Hostel (2mi); Brockhole National Park Visitor Centre (3mi); Holbeck Ghyll Country House Hotel (3mi); Samling (3mi); Ambleside (4mi); Keswick (21mi); Penrith via A591 & A592 (26mi)
Church St
The Terrace
Main Rd
Train Station
Same Scale as Main Map
Glebe Rd
Promenade
Ferry Nab Rd
Birthwaite Rd
Old College La
College Rd
Crescent Rd
Oak St
Claife Ave
Woodland Rd
A592
New Rd
Brook Rd
Combirthwaite Rd
Mill Beck
Rayrigg Rd
Rayrigg Wood
Queens Dr
Thornbarrow Rd
Windermere
To Ambleside
Craig Wk
BOWNESS-ON-WINDERMERE
Lake Rd
Beresford La
Crag Brow
Fallbarrow Rd
Helm Rd
Ash St
Belle Isle
Brantfell Rd
Kendal Rd
Promenade
Glebe Rd
To Lakeside & The Aquarium of the Lakes
See Inset
To Blackwell Arts & Crafts House (1.5mi); Brant Fell (2.5mi); Newby Bridge (8mi); The Aquarium of the Lakes (8mi)
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Jericho's 14 D1
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Sleeping

BUDGET

Lake District Backpackers Lodge (☎ 46374; www.lakedistrictbackpackers.co.uk; High St; dm £13.50; 🖥) A cramped, basic and rather spartan backpackers, squeezed into a converted slate-roofed house near the train station. Cycling and walking tours can be arranged on site.

Windermere YHA Hostel (☎ 43543; windermere@yha.org.uk; Bridge Lane, Troutbeck; dm £13.95; 🕑 mid-Feb–Nov, book ahead at other times; P 🖥) This large whitewashed hostel stands in private grounds and offers roomy, modern dorms, as well as a drying room for hiking gear and a well-stocked shop. It's 2 miles from the station, and offers free pick-up if you phone ahead.

MIDRANGE

Archway (☎ 45613; www.communiken.com/archway; 13 College Rd; d £40-48; ☒) A Windermere favourite, located inside a solid grey-stone terraced house along College Rd. The rooms are comfy and understated, with nary a floral pattern in sight, but the real draw here is the gargantuan breakfast of dry-cured bacon, Manx kippers and homemade pancakes.

Applegarth Hotel (☎ 43206; www.applegarthhotel.co.uk; s/d from £40/60; P ☒) Formerly the home of the Victorian industrial magnate John Riggs, this grand manor house certainly shows signs of the splendour of yesteryear. Light streams through stained-glass windows into the wood-panelled foyer, and the house is full of polished period furniture and original cornicing; though the rooms aren't all quite as impressive, they're still a cut above the B&B norm.

Coach House (☎ 44494; www.lakedistrictbandb.com; Lake Rd; d £54-74; P ☒) An extraordinary little B&B decorated with real flair – forget flowery bedspreads and magnolia walls, here it's all citrus colours, fairy pinks and duck-egg blues offset by chequerboard floors and cast-iron beds. If you're looking for something a little out of the ordinary, this funky little gem certainly won't disappoint.

21 The Lakes (☎ 45052; www.21thelakes.co.uk; Lake Rd; d midweek from £70, weekends £110; P ☒) This newly opened boutique B&B is streets ahead of the other hotels around Windermere. Various rooms around the detached town house have been converted in their own unique style, from super-frilly four-poster suites to a futuristic beauty that comes with widescreen TV, abstract art and a groovy floating bed.

TOP END

Holbeck Ghyll Country House Hotel (☎ 32375; www.holbeckghyll.com; Holbeck Lane; s £135 d £190-370) The ever-so-slightly stuffy Holbeck Ghyll was once an aristocratic hunting lodge, and is now a favourite Lakeland country retreat. The rooms are big, posh and old-fashioned, mixing Laura Ashley wallpapers with matching furniture and the odd brass chandelier.

our pick Samling (☎ 31922; www.thesamling.com; Dove Nest; r weekdays £195-395, weekends £225-425; P ☒) The venue of choice for A-list celebrities taking a break in the Lakes, this utterly bewitching country-house hotel pulls no punches in terms of luxury, sophistication and style. Set on 27 hectares of impeccably kept grounds, the bedrooms range from antique-heavy attic suites to a split-level cottage with mezzanine bedroom and an outdoor hot tub.

Eating

Lighthouse (☎ 88260; Main Rd; mains £8-20; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A buzzy Continental café-restaurant split over three floors. It covers practically all bases, from breakfasts of cappuccino and cinnamon waffles through to sophisticated suppers of fell-bred lamb and sirloin steak.

Kwela's (☎ 44954; 4 High St; mains £11-17; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sun) African flavours underpin the menu of this unusual new restaurant, offering intriguing dishes such as morish skewers and South African bobotie (curried lamb with almonds) in an atmospheric dining area filled with canvas chairs and a sackcloth ceiling.

Porthole (☎ 42793; 2 Ash St; mains £11-25; 🕑 dinner Wed-Mon) An old hand on the Windermere dining scene, this friendly restaurant specialises in fish and seafood, served at small tables in the hugger-mugger dining room and accompanied by a great selection of vintage wines.

Jericho's (☎ 42522; Birch St; mains from £16; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sun) The atmosphere at Jericho's might be a little outmoded, but the food's thoroughly up to date, with a menu that ranges from shellfish risotto to pan-seared seabass. The small open-plan kitchen lets you watch the chefs at work.

Getting There & Away

BUS

National Express coaches run from London (£29, eight to nine hours, three times daily), sometimes travelling via Lancaster or Birmingham.

Bus 555/556 travels from Lancaster (1½ hours) via Kendal (30 minutes) to Windermere, before continuing to Ambleside (20 minutes), Grasmere (30 minutes) and Keswick (50 minutes). There are 10 to 12 buses daily Monday to Saturday, with five direct buses on Sunday.

Bus 505 travels from Windermere to Coniston (40 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) via Ambleside.

The open-topped, half-hourly 599 bus links Grasmere, Ambleside, Brockhole, Windermere, Bowness and Kendal.

TRAIN

Windermere is on the branch line from Oxenholme (£3.50, 30 minutes, hourly), near Kendal, which connects London Euston (£106.50, 3½ hours, eight to 10 times daily Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) to Glasgow or Edinburgh.

KENDAL

☎ 01539 / pop 27,545

The sturdy, grey-slate town of Kendal is practically synonymous with its supersweet mintcake, a peppermint-flavoured bar that sustained Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay on their ascent of Everest in 1953, and still finds its way into the backpacks of many seasoned walkers in the Lake District. During the Middle Ages, Kendal was renowned as a centre for the cloth and wool trades, and the town remains the main commercial centre in the Southern Lakes, with some excellent museums and one of the best arts complexes in the county.

Information

Kendal Laundrette (☎ 733754; Blackhall Rd; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun)

Library (☎ 773520; Stricklandgate; internet access per hr £2; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon & Tue, 9.30am-7pm Wed & Fri, 9.30am-1pm Thu, 9am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun)

Post office (75 Stricklandgate; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 725758; kendaltic@southlakeland.gov.uk; Highgate; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct) Inside the town hall.

Sights

Kendal Museum (☎ 721374; www.kendalmuseum.org.uk; Station Rd; admission £2.70; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec) displays local archaeological finds and explores the history of Kendal Castle. There's also a large natural history section, with lots of fossils and spooky stuffed animals. Alfred Wainwright, of *Pictorial Guide* fame, was honorary curator from 1945 to 1974; his former office has been reconstructed inside the museum.

The **Abbot Hall Art Gallery** (☎ 722464; www.abbothall.org.uk; admission £4.75; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) focuses on 18th- and 19th-century portraits and Lakeland landscapes, including work by John Ruskin (see p602) and local artist George Romney.

The **Museum of Lakeland Life** (☎ 722464; www.lakelandmuseum.org.uk; admission £3.75; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) retraces the region's past using reconstructed buildings, including an Edwardian street scene, and exhibits on local industries such as spinning, mining and bobbin-making. One room recreates the study of Arthur Ransome, author of *Swallows and Amazons*.

Sleeping

Kendal YHA (☎ 0870 770 5893; kendal@yha.org.uk; 118 Highgate; dm £17.50; 🕑 Easter-Oct by advance booking; 💻) A decent hostel inside a whitewashed house along the main street through Kendal, handily located for the Brewery Arts Centre. It's only available by advance booking, so phone ahead to make sure it's open.

Lyndhurst Guest House (☎ 723819; www.lyndhurst-kendal.co.uk; 8 South Rd; s/tw/d from £25/50/52; ☒) Another reliable and welcoming B&B within easy reach of central Kendal, offering eight fluffy rooms decorated in shades of cream and peach.

WORTH THE TRIP

Drunken Duck Inn (☎ 015394-36347; www.drunkenduckinn.co.uk; Barngates, Ambleside; r weekdays £90-185, weekends £115-220; 🅿 ☒) This much-fêted place is a gorgeous cross between a traditional Lakeland inn and a thoroughly modern gastropub. The heart of the Drunken Duck, unsurprisingly, is the main bar, where contemporary leather chairs sit happily alongside stuffed stags' heads and period posters, and a huge ale blackboard is chalked up behind the slate-topped bar. The award-winning country restaurant (mains £15 to £23) offers a menu stuffed with bold and inventive dishes – pigeon marinated in liquorice, perhaps, or venison with chestnut polenta – and the upstairs rooms are all delightful, packed with special little touches such as Roberts radios, unusual prints and bespoke fabrics.

Highgate Hotel (☎ 724229; www.highgatehotel.co.uk; 128 Highgate; s/d £39/58; 🅿 ☒) Right in the middle of town, this black-and-white 18th-century townhouse was built for Kendal's first doctor, but inside it's been thoroughly modernised. The B&B bedrooms come with the usual selection of pine furniture, pale walls and bracket-balanced TVs, but there's not much period character around.

Heaves Hotel (☎ 560396; www.heaveshotel.co.uk; Heaves; s/d from £40/60; 🅿 ☒) For something altogether grander, head for this glorious family-run mansion, set on more than 4 hectares of private grounds and woodland a few miles south of Kendal. It's a classic country-house hotel, all gleaming antiques, huge fireplaces and polished mirrors; the traditionally decorated rooms are large and comfortable, and several boast four-poster beds and views across the rolling parkland.

Beech House (☎ 720385; www.beechhouse-kendal.co.uk; 40 Greenside; s £45-75, d £70-90; 🅿 ☒) This wonderful B&B is the best option in central Kendal, with a fab range of bedrooms kitted out in natural fabrics, tasteful tones and plasma-screen TVs. The deluxe rooms are worth the extra expense, with small sofa areas and honesty fridges stocked up with booze and cold drinks.

Eating

1657 Chocolate House (☎ 740702; www.thechocolatehouse.co.uk; 54 Branthwaite Brow; lunches £2-6) This Kendal tearoom is a chocoholic's dream come true. Handmade chocolates and umpteen varieties of Kendal mintcake are sold on the ground floor; upstairs the café serves ploughman's lunches, cream teas and speciality chocolate drinks – try the Scurvy Knave or the Queen's Corsage.

Waterside Wholefoods (☎ 729743; Kent View, Waterside; lunches £4-8; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) Great vegetarian food served by the river, selling sandwiches, chillis, soups and quiches, with homemade cakes and organic teas to follow.

Green Room & Vats Bar (pizzas from £8, mains £8-14; 🕑 from 10am Mon-Sat) The café-bar at the Brewery Arts Centre serves drinks, wraps and sandwiches during the day, and a more upmarket evening menu featuring crispy pizzas and hearty mains such as Grizedale venison and vegetable tian.

New Moon (☎ 729254; 129 Highgate; mains £9-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This fresh, inviting restaurant is the top place to eat in town, serving classic French and modern British food in a bright, contemporary dining room filled with razoredge tables and stripped wood.

Eclectic (☎ 736184; 36 Kirkland; mains £10-16; 🕑 Tue-Sat) Eclectic by name, eclectic by nature; this three-floored café-venue-bar has something of a split personality, with a funky beer and wine bar on the ground floor, a fusion restaurant on the 1st floor and a private party room on the top level.

Entertainment

Brewery Arts Centre (☎ 725133; Highgate; www.breweryarts.co.uk) An excellent arts centre housing a brace of cinemas, and regular programmes of theatre, dance and live music.

Getting There & Around

BUS

The most useful bus is the 555/556, which stops at Kendal, Windermere, Ambleside, Grasmere and Keswick (10 to 12 times daily). There are two daily return buses from Kendal to Coniston (bus 505; one hour 10 minutes) via Windermere, Hawkshead and Ambleside. Bus X35 travels along the coast to Grange, Newby Bridge, Ulverston and Barrow (hourly Monday to Saturday, three times on Sunday).

TRAIN

Kendal station is on the branch line to Windermere (£3, 15 minutes) from Oxenholme, 2 miles south of town, with hourly trains from Carlisle (£14.80, one hour) and London Euston (£107, four hours).

AROUND KENDAL

Sizergh Castle

South of Kendal is **Sizergh Castle** (☎ 560070; admission £6.20, gardens only £4; 🕑 gardens 12.30-5.30pm, castle 1.30-5.30pm Sun-Thu Apr-Oct), home of the Strickland family for more than 700 years. The castle is renowned for its collection of antiques, portraits and fine furniture, collected by various members of the family over the centuries, and for its elegant Elizabethan interior.

Sizergh Castle is 3.5 miles south of Kendal along the A590. Bus 555/556 from Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and Kendal runs past the castle every hour from Monday to Saturday.

Levens Hall

Five miles south of Kendal is **Levens Hall** (☎ 560 321; www.levenshall.co.uk; house & gardens £9, gardens only £6; 🕓 gardens 10am-5pm, house noon-5pm Sun-Thu Apr–mid-Oct), another impressive Elizabethan manor built around a mid-13th-century *pele* (keep) tower. The beautifully kept house has historical connections to both Nelson and the Duke of Wellington. It's also famous for its 17th-century topiary garden, which looks like something out of *Alice in Wonderland,* and for its many ghosts – the spirits of Levens Hall include a grey lady, a black dog and a pink lady dressed in a printed dress and a mob cap.

Bus 555/556 from Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and Kendal stops near the hall roughly every hour.

AMBLESIDE

☎ 015394 / pop 3560

Standing at the northern end of Lake Windermere and backed by an impressive panorama of grey-green fells, the small town of Ambleside is a bustling hub for the region's hikers and trekkers, with more outdoors shops per square metre than almost anywhere else in the Lakes. Victorian villas and slate-fronted houses line the main street all the way to the central square, where you can stock up with new boots, emergency raingear or that all-important industrial-strength sleeping bag before setting out for one of the many walking trails nearby.

Information

Laundromat (☎ 32231; Kelsick Rd; 🕓 10am-6pm)
Library (☎ 32507; Kelsick Rd; internet access per hr £3; 🕓 10am-5pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 10am-7pm Tue & Fri)
Post office (☎ 33267; Market Pl; 🕓 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 32582; www.amblesidetic@southlakeland.gov.uk; Market Cross; 🕓 9am-5pm)

Sights

The **Armitt Museum** (☎ 31212; www.armitt.com; Rydal Rd; adult £2.50; 🕓 10am-5pm) is worth a look for its local-interest exhibits – some of its unusual artefacts include a lock of John Ruskin's hair, Dorothy Wordsworth's scarf, and a gallery of photos by the local photographer Herbert Bell.

The town makes an excellent base for many well-known Lakeland walks, including the woodland stroll up to **Stock Ghyll Force**, an 18m waterfall plunging into a narrow canyon. Serious hikers are spoilt for choice – several classic circuits start from Ambleside, including the 10-mile **Fairfield Horseshoe** via Nab Scar, Heron Pike, Fairfield and Dove Crag.

Activities

Low Wood Watersports & Activity Centre (☎ 39441; watersports@elhmail.co.uk) hires rowing boats (one/four hours £6/18), kayaks and canoes (two/four hours £10/15), sailing boats (two/four hours £30/45) and motor boats (one/four hours £10/33). It also offers sailing, water-skiing and wakeboarding tuition and a climbing wall (£3 per climb).

Ambleside is also on the **Windermere Lake Cruises** route (see p594).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Low Wray (☎ 32810; www.lowwraycampsite.co.uk; sites per adult/car/tent £4.50/3/5; 🕓 Easter-Oct) One of three National Trust (NT) camp sites in the Lake District, in a great woody location 3 miles south of Ambleside.

Ambleside Backpackers (☎ 32340; www.englishlakesbackpackers.co.uk; dm £15; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻) This independent hostel offers 72 beds in a converted Lakeland cottage, but the bunk beds are packed in exceedingly tight; thankfully, there's more space to be found in the wood-floored lounge and the huge industrial kitchen.

Ambleside YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5672; ambleside@yha.org.uk; Windermere Rd; dm £19.95; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻) A fantastically organised YHA hostel right by the lake, a mile south of Ambleside town. It's the hub for many YHA activities, from walking to water sports – though it's very popular and can get a little crowded on busy weekends.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Compston House Hotel (☎ 32305; www.compstonhouse.co.uk; Compston Rd; d from £48; ⊠) This imaginative place is as American as apple pie. All the rooms are named after US states, from flowery Hawaii to maritime Maine (complete with Cape Cod bedspread), and the breakfast features authentic American pancakes doused in maple syrup.

Grey Friar Lodge Hotel (☎ 33158; www.cumbria-hotels.co.uk; Clappersgate; d £56-116; Ⓟ ⊠) A charming Victorian-era vicarage tucked away in secluded gardens in the hamlet of Clappersgate, near Ambleside. The period architecture of the house, with its gabled exterior and chimney-topped slate roof, is matched by the splendid olde-worlde rooms.

Gables (☎ 34734; www.thegables-ambleside.co.uk; Church Walk; r £59-90; ⊠) This grand half-timbered house is one of Ambleside's most impressive places to stay. From the neat lobby filled with rattan chairs and willow arrangements, the winding stairs lead to a choice of rooms furnished with beige carpets, simple curtains and plain pine furniture.

Easedale Lodge (☎ 32112; www.easedaleambleside.co.uk; Compston Rd; d £60-80; ⊠) On the corner of Compston Rd, this excellent B&B makes a great-value base. All the tasteful bedrooms have crisp white bed linen, country prints and the odd characterful extra, but it's worth holding out for a fell-view room if you can.

Lakes Lodge (☎ 33240; www.lakeslodge.co.uk; Lake Rd; r from £90; ⊠ 💻) There's no sign of any HP sauce or lacy doilies at this swanky little gem – retro chairs, purple walls and laminate floors adorn the breakfast area, while the low-key bedrooms feature big white beds, in-room DVD players and superminimal décor.

Waterhead Hotel (☎ 08458-504503; waterhead@elhmail.co.uk; d weekdays £156-210, weekends £170-230; Ⓟ ⊠) This lakeshore hotel has been given the full boutique makeover. The designer décor simply screams good taste, from the brown leather chairs, pale pine floors and canvas art in the lobby through to the stripped-back bedrooms, all named after a local waterfall and equipped with a matching photo print.

Eating

Apple Pie (☎ 33679; Rydal Rd; lunches £3-8) A sunny café serving sandwiches, jacket potatoes and lots of homemade cakes, including homemade apple pie smothered with vanilla ice cream.

Pippins (☎ 31338; 10 Lake Rd; lunches £4-10) Reliable café serving full English breakfasts, jacket potatoes, and sandwiches.

our pick **Lucy's on a Plate** (☎ 31191; www.lucysofambleside.co.uk; Church St; lunch £5-9, dinner £15-21; 🕓 10am-9pm) This fantastic little gastronomic emporium offers classic Cumbrian cooking with a quirky twist – the eclectic menu features dishes such as fruity porker, fell-walker filler and blushing cod. There's also a great deli next door and a funky wine bar across the road.

Zeffirelli's (☎ 33845; Compston Rd; pizza £5.50-7.45; 🕓 lunch & dinner) Inventive pizzas and pasta served in a light, lively dining room with its own glazed 'waterfall'. Zeff's also runs an upstairs jazz club and the town's cinema; the 'Double Feature' menu (£15.95) includes cinema tickets and a two-course meal.

Glass House (☎ 32137; Rydal Rd; lunch £6-14, dinner £11-18; 🕓 lunch & dinner) Infamously featured on Gordon Ramsay's *Kitchen Nightmares,* the Glass House has since risen from the ashes and reinvented itself as one of Ambleside's top restaurants. The varied menu mixes Mediterranean flavours with the best of local produce, and the smart dining room is housed inside a converted 16th-century watermill, with original millwheels, cogs and machinery.

Drinking & Entertainment

Royal Oak (☎ 33382; Market Pl) This old whitewashed inn is the best pub in Ambleside, with hearty pub mains, good ales and a busy outside terrace.

Zeffirelli's Cinema (☎ 33100; Compston Rd) A two-screen cinema next to Zeffirelli's Restaurant, with extra screens in a converted church down the road.

Shopping

Compston Rd has enough equipment shops to launch an assault on Everest, with branches of **Rohan** (☎ 32946) and **Gaymer Sports** (☎ 33305) on Market Cross. **Black's** (☎ 33197; 42 Compston Rd) is a favourite with hikers, and the **Climber's Shop** (☎ 32297; Compston Rd) specialises in rock-climbing gear.

Getting There & Around

Bus 555 (and bus 599 from April to September) regularly travels from Grasmere (20 minutes), to Windermere (15 minutes) and Kendal (45 minutes).

From April to October, bus 505 runs from Coniston (35 minutes, 12 times daily Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday), and from Kendal (30 minutes, twice daily) via Windermere.

Ghyllside Cycles (☎ 33592; The Slack) and **Bike Treks** (☎ 31505; Compston Rd) hire mountain bikes from £14 per day.

AROUND AMBLESIDE

Rydal Mount

Wordsworth moved to **Rydal Mount** (☎ 33002; www.rydalmount.co.uk; admission £5, gardens only £2.50; 🕓 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Mon Nov & Feb) in 1813 and remained here until his death in 1850. The house is packed with original furniture and possessions, including Wordsworth's pen, inkstand and picnic box, and his favourite pair of ice skates; you can also wander around the book-lined sitting room, Wordsworth's bedroom and his top-floor study. Below the house is **Dora's Field**, which Wordsworth planted with daffodils in memory of his eldest daughter, who died of tuberculosis in 1847.

The house is 1.5 miles northwest of Ambleside, off the A591. Bus 555 (and bus 599 from April to October), between Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and Kendal, stops at the end of the drive.

GRASMERE

☎ 015394 / pop 1458

Nestled at the base of a broad valley dotted with oak woods and peaceful fields, the little village of Grasmere is one of the prettiest in the Central Lakes. Wordsworth lived at nearby Dove Cottage for nine years and occasionally taught at the village school, which is now a famous gingerbread shop; he's buried in St Oswald's churchyard with his wife Mary and beloved sister Dorothy. Sadly, the Wordsworth connections have their drawbacks; the village is very much on the coach-tour trail, and is practically overrun with day-trippers in summer.

Wordsworth penned some of his greatest poems at **Dove Cottage** (☎ 35544; www.wordsworth.org.uk; adult £5.95; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm). He moved in with his sister Dorothy in 1799, and was later joined by new wife Mary and his three eldest children – John, Dora and Thomas – who were born here in 1803, 1804 and 1806. Covered with climbing roses and illuminated by tiny latticed windows, it's a fascinating place to visit, although it can get very busy. A half-hour guided tour is included in the admission price, and entrance is managed by timed tickets to avoid overcrowding.

Next door, the new **Wordsworth Museum** houses a fascinating collection of letters, portraits and manuscripts relating to the Romantic movement.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Thorney How YHA Hostel (dm £13; 🕒 Apr-Oct) This lovely little hostel has a real claim to fame – it was the first one purchased by the YHA, way back in 1931. The small stone house is popular with walkers on the C2C route. Contact Butharlyp How YHA Hostel for bookings.

Butharlyp How YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5836; grasmere@yha.org.uk; dm £15.50; 🕒 daily Feb-Nov, weekends Dec & Jan; P 💻) Just to the north of Grasmere off Easedale Rd, this converted Victorian house has lots of modern rooms, a café and internet access; staff can arrange guided walks and activity trips.

Grasmere Hostel (☎ 35055; www.grasmerehostel.co.uk; Broadrayne Farm; dm £15.50) A great little independent hostel just off the A591, boasting a 'Nordic sauna' and a luxurious lounge lit by skylights and a round picture window. Bus 555 stops at the end of the road on request.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

How Foot Lodge (☎ 35366; www.howfoot.co.uk; Town End; d £64; P ☒) Owned by the Wordsworth Trust, this mid-19th-century villa is just a stone's throw from Dove Cottage, and offers four light, flowery rooms including one with a private sunlounge. The décor's a smidgen chintzy, but it's excellent value for money.

Grasmere Hotel (☎ 35277; www.grasmerehotel.co.uk; Broadgate; d £70-110; P ☒) An imposing three-storey Victorian mansion, perched on the banks of the River Rothay, and recently overhauled. Carved wooden beds, tasteful prints and expensive soft furnishings characterise every room, and downstairs there's a posh vaulted-roof restaurant decked out with padded chairs and chandeliers.

Lake View Country House (☎ 35384; www.lakeviewgrasmere.com; Lake View Drive; d £77-99; P ☒) This stone-fronted house has the best view of any hotel in Grasmere, overlooking private gardens all the way to the lakeshore. The four rooms are all individually styled, with a couple of country beauties with private lounges and whirlpool baths – ideal after a long day's slog on the fells.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lancrigg (☎ 35317; www.lancrigg.co.uk; Easedale; r £140-210; P ☒) This vegetarian-only country house hotel is an utter gem, tucked away in private grounds half a mile from Grasmere. Formerly the home of surgeon and Arctic adventurer John Richardson, and once a favourite meeting place for the Lakeland poets, the stately house contains a jumble of character-filled rooms, ranging from a four-poster room equipped with Turkish rugs and mahogany furniture to a huge suite in Richardson's old library, complete with plasterwork ceiling, lace-draped bed and freestanding bath. Stunning fell views and a swish vegetarian restaurant are the icing on the cake.

White Moss House (☎ 35295; www.whitemoss.com; Rydal Water; d £170-188, cottage per person £218; P ☒) This pricey pile trades heavily on its Wordsworth ties – William bought it for his son Willie, and often stayed here – but it's a lovely place to stay in its own right, with plenty of rambling rooms filled with period trinkets, well-worn armchairs and burnished furniture, as well as a detached cottage with lake views.

Eating

Rowan Tree (☎ 435528; Stocks Lane; mains £3-10, pizzas £6-9; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This peach-coloured riverside café does a mean cream tea by day, with a menu of pizzas, fish and veggie-friendly mains by night.

Sarah Nelson's Gingerbread Shop (☎ 35428; www.grasmeregingerbread.co.uk; Church Stile; 6 pieces of gingerbread £5.25; 🕒 9.15am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) You can't leave Grasmere without visiting this classic cake shop, where the ladies still dress in frilly pinnies and the gingerbread has been made to the same recipe since 1854.

Travellers Rest Inn (☎ 35604; www.lakedistrictinns.co.uk; mains £8-14; P) This sturdy 16th-century pub on the A591 road from Grasmere has all the trappings of a quintessential Lakeland inn, including slate-fronted fireplaces, oak-beamed ceilings and a bevy of real ales. It also offers accommodation (double room weekdays £84, weekends £104).

our pick **Jumble Room** (☎ 35188; Langdale Rd; mains £11-20; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) This boho bistro recently scooped a top national award from Les Routiers, and it's hard not to be swept up in the sheer energy and enthusiasm of the place. Letter-print tablecloths, porcelain knick-knacks and spotty seats are packed into the tiny dining room, and the menu wanders at will from England to the Far East.

Getting There & Away

The hourly 555 bus runs from Windermere to Grasmere (15 minutes), via Ambleside, Rydal Church and Dove Cottage. The open-top 599 runs from Kendal via Windermere and Bowness (one hour, five daily April to October).

HAWKSHEAD

☎ 015394 / pop 1640

Lakeland villages don't come much more picturesque than Hawkshead, with its huddle of cobbled streets, whitewashed pubs, arched alleys and rickety cottages. It's hardly changed since the days when Wordsworth arrived here to attend the village school, and was once a bustling centre for the local wool trade; until the 12th century, the village was owned by the monastery at Furness Abbey. Cars are banned in the village centre throughout the year; sadly, the same can't be said for tourist traffic.

You can almost imagine a young William Wordsworth gazing out of the windows of the **Hawkshead Old Grammar School** (admission £2; 🕒 10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Apr-Oct), which the young poet attended from 1779 to 1787. Here Wordsworth would have studied the traditional classical curriculum (especially Latin and Greek), as well as mathematics, science and contemporary literature – he began writing his first poetry at the age of 14 while at Hawkshead. The ground-floor classroom still contains much of its original furniture (including a desk in which naughty young William carved his name) and upstairs you can visit the old headmaster's study.

The **Beatrix Potter Gallery** (NT; ☎ 36355; Red Lion Sq; admission £3.60; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Apr-Sep, open all week in Oct) contains lots of original illustrations from the author's children's books, with an annually changing exhibition drawn from the NT's Beatrix Potter collection. The museum is housed in the old offices of Beatrix's husband, solicitor William Heelis. Entry is by timed ticket.

Sleeping & Eating

Hawkshead YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5856; hawkshead@yha.org.uk; dm £13.95; 💻) A beautiful hostel in a fine Regency house with its original staircase crowned by an ornate cupola. It's a mile south on the road to Newby Bridge; the cross-lakes shuttle and bus 505/506 both pass nearby.

Ann Tyson's Cottage (☎ 36405; www.anntysons.co.uk; Wordsworth St; s £45, d £58-66; ☒) For the full Wordsworth experience, you could stay in the house in which he lodged with his brother John while attending Hawkshead School. The old cob-walled cottage is tucked away down one of Hawkshead's narrow lanes; the rooms are on the cosy side, but very atmospheric.

Ivy House Hotel (☎ 36204; www.ivyhousehotel.com; Main St; d lodge/main house £70/80; P ☒) A Grade II–listed Georgian house in British racing green, with six plush rooms in the main house and five more in the detached lodge. All are decorated in classic country style, with a surfeit of china, cushions and antique clocks.

Red Lion (☎ 36213; www.redlionhawkshead.co.uk; mains £6-15) This beautiful 15th-century coaching inn serves up local dishes such as Cumberland sausage in Yorkshire pudding and steak and Hawkshead bitter pie. There are pleasant, unfussy B&B rooms upstairs (double room £70 to £80).

Getting There & Away

Hawkshead is linked with Windermere, Ambleside and Coniston by bus 505 (12 times daily April to October). The **Cross-Lakes Shuttle** (☎ 45161) climbs to Hill Top (£2.30, 10 minutes, nine times daily April to September, weekends only October) before connecting with Windermere cruise boats from Ferry House; a couple of daily buses also travel to Grizedale (£3.15, 15 minutes).

AROUND HAWKSHEAD

Grizedale Forest

Stretching out across the hills between Coniston Water and Esthwaite Water is Grizedale Forest, a dense woodland of oak, larch and pine; its name derives from the Old Norse for wild boar. Since 1977 artists have been fashioning outdoor sculptures in the forest, and there are now more than 90 scattered throughout the park, including a wooden xylophone, a wave of carved ferns and a huge 'man of the forest'.

Grizedale Forest is a popular destination for walking and mountain biking. Bikes can be hired from **Grizedale Mountain Bike Hire** (☎ 01229-860369; www.grizedalemountainbikes.co.uk; bikes half-/full day £14/24; 🕒 9am-5pm Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb), at the **Grizedale tourist office** (☎ 01229-860010; www.grizedale.org; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter). There's also a small café where you can refuel.

The **Cross-Lakes Shuttle** (☎ 015394-45161) runs from Hawkshead to Grizedale (£3.15, two daily April to September, weekends only October).

Hill Top

Beatrix Potter wrote many of her best-known stories in this picture-postcard **farmhouse** (NT; ☎ 36269; adult £5.10; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed Apr-Oct) surrounded by a flower-filled garden and vegetable patch in the quiet village of Near Sawrey. If you're a Potter fan, you might well recognise the house already – it was used in many of her tales, including the *Samuel Whiskers* stories. Tickets are sold for set times; expect long queues during school holidays.

The house is 2 miles south of Hawkshead; bus 505 (15 minutes, hourly) travels through the village, or you can catch the Cross-Lakes Shuttle (£2.30 from Hawkshead, nine daily).

CONISTON

☎ 015394 / pop 1948

Above the tranquil surface of Coniston Water, with its gliding steam yachts and quiet boats, looms the craggy, pock-marked peak known as the Old Man of Coniston (801m). The nearby village grew up around the copper-mining industry; these days, there are just a few sleepy streets, with two fine pubs and some tourist shops, making Coniston an excellent place for relaxing by the quiet lakeside.

Coniston is best known for the world-record speed attempts made on the lake by Sir Malcolm Campbell and his son, Donald, between the 1930s and 1960s. Tragically, after smashing the record several times, Donald was killed during an attempt in 1967, when his futuristic jet boat *Bluebird* flipped at around 320mph. The boat and its pilot were found in 2001; Campbell was buried in the cemetery near St Andrew's church.

Information

Summitreks (☎ 41212; www.summitreks.co.uk; 14 Yewdale Rd) Arranges outdoor activities and hires out walking gear, as well as kayaks and canoes (£16/23 per day).

Tourist office (☎ 41533; www.conistontic.org; Coniston Car & Coach Park; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm) Sells the Coniston Loyalty Card (£2), which offers local discounts.

Village Pantry (☎ 41155; Yewtree Rd; internet access per 30min £2)

Sights

The **Ruskin Museum** (☎ 41164; www.ruskinmuseum.com; admission £4.25; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mar-Nov) explores Coniston's history, touching on copper mining, Arthur Ransome and the Campbell story; the museum's newest acquisition is the tailfin of the fated *Bluebird* boat, recovered in 2001. There's also a section on John Ruskin, with displays of his writings, watercolours and sketchbooks.

Ruskin bought the country estate of **Brantwood** (☎ 41396; www.brantwood.org.uk; admission £5.50; 🕒 11am-5.30pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov, 11am-4.30pm Wed-Sun mid-Nov–mid-Mar) in 1871 and spent the next 20 years redesigning the house and grounds in pursuit of his concept of 'organic architecture'. The end result is undoubtedly the finest country estate in the Lake District, incorporating the lavish mansion and 101 hectares of woodland and landscaped gardens. Both of the Coniston launches (see below) stop at Brantwood.

Activities

The steam yacht **Gondola** (☎ 63850; adult £5.90; 🕒 5 daily Apr-Oct) was launched on Coniston Water in 1859. The luxurious saloons have been completely refurbished by the NT, and the boat still runs like clockwork between Brantwood and Coniston Pier.

The **Coniston Launch** (☎ 36216; www.conistonlaunch.co.uk) also offers lake cruises. The Northern cruise (return £5) calls at the Waterhead Hotel, Torver and Brantwood, while the Southern cruise (£7.40) sails to the jetties at Torver, Park a Mor, Lake Bank, Sunny Bank and Brantwood. There are also special cruises exploring the Campbells on Coniston and the *Swallows and Amazons* story, as well as a twilight trip (bring your own wine).

The **Coniston Boating Centre** (☎ 41366; Coniston Jetty) hires out rowboasts (£8 per hour), motor boats (£16), canoes (two hours £15) and dinghies (two hours £35).

Sleeping

Coniston Hall Camp Site (☎ 41223; sites from £11; 🕒 Easter-Oct) This lovely lakeside camp site unsurprisingly gets very busy, so book ahead.

Holly How YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 779 5770; conistonhh@yha.org.uk; Far End; dm £11.80; 🕒 weekends & school holidays) The closest hostel to town is inside an old slate house, right on the main walking trail up to the Old Man; all the accommodation is in dorms with four to 10 beds. It's friendly and efficient, if a little bland; bikes can be hired on-site.

Coppermines YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5772; dm £11.95; 🕒 Easter-Oct) This old mine-manager's house is a couple of miles into the mountains along an unpaved road. The facilities are pretty basic – a kitchen, common room and showers is about all the luxury you'll get – but it makes a good base for hikers looking to get an early start.

Sun Hotel (☎ 41248; www.thesunconiston.com; s £35-50, d £70-80; P ☒) Coniston's most historic inn stands on a hillside just above town. Most of the 10 bedrooms have lake outlooks, but the real attraction is the fantastic 16th-century pub next door, with its original stone floor, timber pillars and range fireplace (mains £8.50 to £16). Donald Campbell had his headquarters here during his fateful campaign.

Old Rectory Hotel (☎ 41353; www.theoldrectoryhotel.com; Torver; r £60-74; ☒) Frilly, frippy rooms inside a former vicarage surrounded by rolling fields. It's cosy and welcoming, and the owners will make sure you stock up with a gutbusting Cumbrian breakfast.

Wheelgate Country Guest House (☎ 41418; www.wheelgate.co.uk; Little Arrow; r £68-78; ☒) The pastel rooms at this old whitewashed farmhouse are all named after local lakes; the nicest is Buttermere, with a mauve-canopied four-poster bed and wicker chairs, but Derwent is also worth a look, with its oak beams, low ceiling and hefty wooden furniture.

Eating

Black Bull (☎ 41335; www.conistonbrewery.com; Yewdale Rd; lunch £4-6, dinner £8-14) This creaky coaching inn has welcomed many famous guests over the years (including Coleridge, de Quincey and Donald Campbell), but it's best known for its home-brewed Bluebird Bitter and Old Man Ale.

Bluebird Café (☎ 41649; Lake Rd; lunch £4-6; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) This busy café is right by the main Coniston jetty, and makes an ideal spot for a quick sandwich or a slice of cake before hopping onto the cross-lake launch.

Harry's (☎ 41389; 4 Yewdale Rd; lunches £6, dinner £8-12; 🕒 all day) A lively wine bar and bistro with a decent menu of all-day breakfasts, doorstop sandwiches and evening mains, and deep sofas to sprawl out on after a long day's hike.

Getting There & Around

From April to October, bus 505 runs from Windermere (50 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) via Ambleside; it also runs from Kendal (one hour 10 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday).

The Ruskin Explorer ticket includes travel on the 505 Coniston Rambler between Windermere, a return ticket on the Coniston launch and entrance to Brantwood. It's available from bus drivers and the tourist office.

LANGDALE

☎ 015394

Surrounded on all sides by towering peaks and saw-tooth ridges, the Langdale Valley is one of the most dramatic sights in the Lake District. The main road snakes past Elterwater into the valley of Great Langdale, starting point for some of the region's classic trails – including the trek into the Langdale Pikes past Harrison

Stickle (736m) and Pike o' Stickle (709m), and the ascent of Crinkle Crags (819m). An ancient packhorse trail leads through Little Langdale over Wrynose and Hardknott Passes to the coast, passing the ruins of Hardknott Roman Fort en route.

Sleeping & Eating

Stickle Barn (☎ 37356; Great Langdale) A popular walker's pub tucked at the foot of the Langdale Pikes in a converted barn. As you'd expect it specialises in generous hiking food: Hungarian goulash, sausage and mash and nourishing soup are all on the menu. There's a basic bunkhouse, with breakfast served in the main inn.

Great Langdale Camp Site (NT; ☎ 37668; langdalecamp@nationaltrust.org.uk; sites per adult/car £4.50/3) A well-run National Trust camp site about a mile up the valley.

New Dungeon Ghyll Hotel (☎ 37213; www.dungeon-ghyll.co.uk; d £90-104; 🅿 ☒) For something modern but still with some local character, this ivy-clad place is the perfect choice. Outside it's all stone chimneys and grey slate; inside it's a thoroughly current country hotel, offering spacious rooms with all the mod cons and a fine-dining restaurant serving local game, meat and fish.

Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel (☎ 37272; www.odg.co.uk; d £96-100; 🅿 ☒) You couldn't ask for a more welcome sight at the end of a long trek than this famous Lakeland inn. It's been the favourite getaway for many well-known climbers and walkers over the years, and continues to pull in the punters thanks to its reassuringly old-fashioned ambience and its timeless walker's bar. The rooms are showing their age in places, but with views like this, do you really care?

Getting There & Away

Bus 516 (the Langdale Rambler, six daily, five on Sunday) is the only scheduled bus service to the valley, with stops at Ambleside, Elterwater, Skelwith Bridge and the Old Dungeon Ghyll in Great Langdale.

WASDALE

☎ 019467

Framed by a brooding crown of mountains and scree-strewn slopes, the inky black lake of Wastwater is the deepest in England (79m). It's one of the wildest locations in the Lakes, home to just a few houses and a single sturdy inn, all of which are dwarfed by the majestic peaks of nearby Scaféll Pike and Great Gable. It's a world away from the hustle and buzz of Lake Windermere, which makes Wastwater a favourite spot for walkers looking to experience the Lake District's more untamed side.

The **Barn Door Shop** (☎ 26384) sells maps and guides and oversees the Wasdale website (www.wasdaleweb.com).

Sleeping

Wasdale Head Campsite (NT; ☎ 26220; www.wasdalecampsite.org.uk; sites per car/tent £3/4.50) The NT's third Lakeland camp site is perhaps the pick of the bunch, nestled in a fantastic spot beneath the Scaféll Range.

Wast Water YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6082; wastwater@yha.org.uk; Wasdale Hall; dm £11.95; 🕒 year-round by advance booking) This lakeside hostel is a real beauty, a half-timbered 19th-century mansion that still boasts many of its original Gothic features. Accommodation is mostly in four- to eight-bed dorms, with a small library, convivial lounge and decent-sized kitchen, but it's the fantastic location that's the real draw.

our pick **Wasdale Head Inn** (☎ 26229; www.wasdale.com; d £48-98; 🅿 ☒) Renowned as the spiritual home of British rock climbing, this wonderful inn has everything the discerning hillwalker could possibly wish for: cosy rooms with big, soft beds; a homely restaurant decorated with old mountaineering photos; and a firelit bar where you can rest those weary bones and down a few muscle-soothing drams.

In Santon Bridge, 2.5 miles southwest of Wastwater, the **Bridge Inn** (☎ 26221; www.santonbridgeinn.com; s £55-58, d £60-75) is a whitewashed country inn that offers decent food and rooms, and hosts the World's Biggest Liar Competition each November.

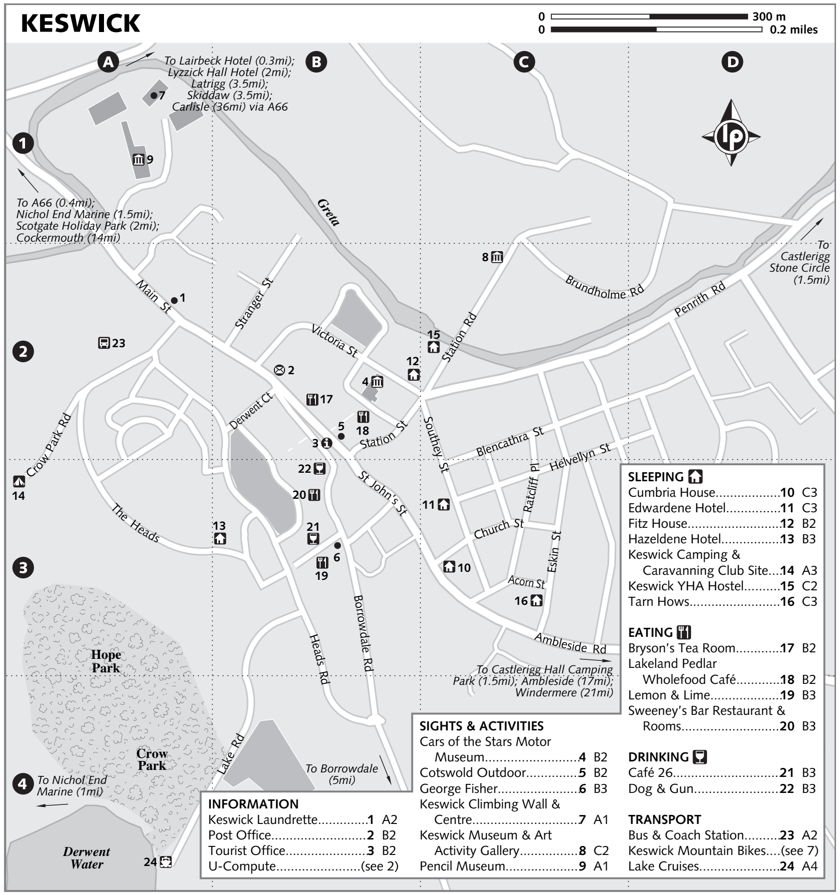
Getting There & Away

The only public transport to Wastwater is the **Wasdale Taxibus** (☎ 25308), which runs between Gosforth and Wasdale Head on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday – ring to book a seat.

KESWICK

☎ 017687 / pop 4958

Standing at the head of the island-studded, tree-lined lake of Derwent Water, the grey slate town of Keswick is the busiest tourist centre in the Northern Lakes, and a humming hub for outdoor activities of all descriptions, ranging from fell walking to water sports. Several classic walking trails wind their way across the surrounding hilltops, including the long-distance Cumbria Way and the hilltop climbs to Catbells and Castle Crag, which makes Keswick a popular walking base; it's also famous as the place where graphite was discovered in the early 16th century, and for inventing the humble lead pencil.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To Castlerigg Stone Circle (1.5mi)
To Castlerigg Hall Camping Park (1.5mi); Ambleside (17mi); Windermere (21mi)
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Information

Keswick Laundrette (☎ 75448; Main St; 🕒 7.30am-7pm)

Post office (☎ 72269; 48 Main St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 72645; www.keswick.org; Moot Hall, Market Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) Sells discounted launch tickets.

U-Compute (☎ 72269; 48 Main St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm; per hr £3) Internet access, located above the post office.

Sights

The pencil was first mass-produced in Keswick, and the curious **Pencil Museum** (☎ 73626; www.pencils.co.uk; Southy Works; admission £3; 🕒 9.30am-4pm) explores its history through a variety of odd exhibits; the main draws are a reconstruction of the Seathwaite graphite mine and the world's largest pencil, measuring an impressive 8m from point to tip.

The **Cars of the Stars Motor Museum** (☎ 73757; www.carsofthestars.com; Standish St; admission £4; 🕒 10am-5pm) is a must for motorheads. Its fleet of celebrity vehicles includes Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Herbie the Love Bug, a Batmobile, KITT

WORTH THE TRIP

Wordsworth was born in the small market town of Cockermouth in 1770. His family home, now known as **Wordsworth House** (NT; ☎ 01900-824805; Main St; admission £4.70; 🕐 11am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Mar-Oct, plus Mon Jul & Aug), has been painstakingly restored by the National Trust based on family accounts from the Wordsworth archive. Highlights include the flagstoned kitchen, the grand 1st-floor drawing room and the beautiful walled garden, immortalised in Wordsworth's epic biographical poem *The Prelude*.

The X4/X5 bus travels from Workington via Cockermouth before travelling on to Keswick (one hour), Troutbeck (one hour 20 minutes) and Penrith (one hour 40 minutes). There are 16 daily buses Monday to Saturday, and six on Sunday.

from *Knightrider*, the A-Team van and the Delorean from *Back to the Future*, as well as a huge collection of Bond cars.

Keswick Museum & Art Gallery (☎ 73263; Station Rd; admission free; 🕐 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct) has remained largely unchanged since its opening in 1898. It's still decorated in typically austere Victorian style, with plenty of glass cases and dusty exhibits including a penny-farthing bike, a 'geological piano' and a 500-year-old cat.

A mile east of Keswick stands **Castlerigg Stone Circle**, a group of 48 stones between 3000 and 4000 years old, set on a hilltop surrounded by a breathtaking amphitheatre of mountains. The purpose of the circle is uncertain (current opinion is divided between a Bronze Age meeting place and a celestial timepiece), but one thing's certain – those prehistoric builders certainly knew a good site when they saw one.

Activities

BOAT TRIPS

The **Keswick Launch Company** (☎ 72263; www.keswick-launch.co.uk) calls at seven landing stages around the lake: Ashness Gate, Lodore Falls, High Brandlehow, Low Brandlehow, Hawse End, Nichol End and back to Keswick. Boats leave every hour, clockwise and anticlockwise (return £6.50, 50 minutes); single fares to each jetty are also available. There are at least six daily boats from March to November, as well as an evening cruise at 7.30pm in summer (£7.50, one hour, May to September). There are only two daily sailings from November to March.

Nichol End Marine (☎ 73082; Nichol End; 🕐 9am-5pm) hires out kayaks, sailboards, rowboats and motor-boats.

WALKING

There are plenty of walks in the Keswick area. An old railway path (part of the C2C cycle trail) leads up to Lattrigg Fell; other popular routes travel to Walla Crag, Castle Crag and Skiddaw. The tourist office has booklets on many local walks, and organises a daily ramble that leaves from the main office at 10.15am (£8).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Keswick YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5894; keswick@yha.org.uk; Station Rd; dm £17.50; ☒ 💻) One of the best hostels in the Lakes, recently refurbished and perched in a glorious spot overlooking the river and Fitz Park. Most of the beds are in small, modern dorms, some of which have private balconies above the river.

There are some excellent local camp sites around Keswick, including **Castlerigg Hall Camping Park** (☎ 74499; www.castlerigg.co.uk; sites £13.50-15.50) and **Keswick Camping & Caravanning Club Site** (☎ 72392; Crow Park Rd; sites £14-18) near the lake.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Tarn Hows (☎ 73217; www.tarnhows.co.uk; 3-5 Eskin St; s £29.50, d £59-64) Arguably the best of the B&Bs around Eskin St, this impressive B&B prides itself on its upmarket rooms, all of which are distinguished by a touch of baroque splendour – expect rich fabrics, wrought-iron bedsteads and plush quilts.

Cumbria House (☎ 73171; www.cumbriahouse.co.uk; 1 Derwent Water Pl; r £50-60; ☒) This fine Georgian town house B&B has several warm-coloured bedrooms split over several floors, including three top-floor rooms that combine into a single suite. The massive breakfast has been voted the best in northwest England, and the house is admirably eco-friendly – it's carbon neutral and champions fair trade. The owners also organise guided walks.

Hazeldene Hotel (☎ 72106; www.hazeldene-hotel.co.uk; The Heads; d £70-80, ste £90; ☒) One of a string of imposing villas overlooking Hope Park, with lots of excellent-value rooms finished in shades of lavender, turquoise and cream, as well as a glorious 'Dene Suite' with its own stone fireplace and sweeping views across the fells.

Lairbeck Hotel (☎ 73373; Vicarage Hill; www.lairbeckhotel-keswick.co.uk; d £94-123; Ⓟ ☒) Ticking grandfather clocks, Oriental rugs and faded period photos sum up the atmosphere at this charmingly outmoded country hotel, where you almost expect some waistcoated gents to stroll out of the smoking room chugging on their Meerschaum pipes. Heavy curtains, dark-wood furniture and cast-iron beds are dotted around the spacious rooms, all of which continue the unmistakably Victorian vibe.

Lyzzick Hall Hotel (☎ 72277; www.lyzzickhall.co.uk; Underskiddaw; r £108; Ⓟ ☒ 🏊) Settings just don't get any better than at this fabulously situated hotel, huddled on the slopes of Skiddaw a couple of miles from Keswick. The plain rooms are unfussy, simply furnished and boast the kind of jaw-dropping Lakeland view you'd normally pay through the nose for; added extras include a heated pool and Jacuzzi, a country restaurant and a panoramic patio terrace that's out of this world.

Other reliable choices:

Edwardene Hotel (☎ 73586; 26 Southey St; www.edwardenehotel.com; s £35, d £68-72; ☒) Snug rooms in an end-of-terrace Victorian house.

Fitz House (☎ 74488; www.fitzhouse.co.uk; 47 Brundolme Tce; r £40-50; ☒) Lovely B&B with views across Fitz Park and a private guest conservatory.

Eating & Drinking

Bryson's Tea Room (☎ 72257; 42 Main St; cakes £2-5) Perhaps the most famous bakery in the Lakes, Bryson's Tea Room is renowned for its traditional fruitcakes, Battenburgs and chocolate sponges.

Lakeland Pedlar Wholefood Café (☎ 74492; www.lakelandpedlar.co.uk; Hendersons Yard; mains £3-8; 🕐 9am-5pm) This homely wholefood café–cum–bike shop dishes out generous portions of homemade soups, chunky sandwiches, Tex-Mex mains and crumbly cakes. Bikes are available for hire upstairs.

Lemon & Lime (☎ 73088; 31 Lake Rd; mains £6-14; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This global bistro takes a mix-and-match approach to its wide-ranging cuisine – for starters you might choose falafels, spring rolls or Yakitori chicken, with Malaysian noodles, Thai curry or chicken schnitzel to follow.

Sweeney's Bar Restaurant & Rooms (☎ 772990; 18-20 Lake Rd; mains £7-12) This sophisticated wine brasserie–bar is the perfect marriage between modern style and classic Cumbrian cooking. Enjoy a predinner drink on one of the brown leather sofas before tucking into a plate of Cumberland sausage or steamed fish in the airy dining room.

Café 26 (☎ 80863; 26 Lake Rd) Knightsbridge comes to Keswick at this groovy wine bar, decked out with leather bench seats, burgundy paintwork and velour cushions. Oenophiles will appreciate the extensive wine list, and if you enjoy yourself just a little *too* much, there are several contemporary rooms above the bar.

Dog & Gun (☎ 73463; 2 Lake Rd; mains around £6) With its low ceilings, tobacco-tinted walls and wooden booths, this old Keswick boozer makes a fine place for a swift pint and a plate of nosh.

Getting There & Away

The ever-reliable bus 555/556 (the LakesLink) connects Keswick with Ambleside (40 minutes) Windermere (50 minutes) and Kendal (1½ hours) 10 times daily (including Sundays).

The hourly X4/X5 travels from Penrith to Workington via Keswick (17 daily Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday).

Getting Around

Off-road bikes can be hired from **Keswick Mountain Bikes** (☎ 75202; 1 Daleston Ct) and **Keswick Climbing Wall & Activity Centre** (☎ 72000; www.keswickclimbingwall.co.uk) for £15 to £17 per day.

BORROWDALE & BUTTERMERE VALLEYS

☎ 017687

Hemmed in by wooded fells, flat fields and pointy granite peaks, and sprinkled with the kind of remote farmhouses and sturdy cottages that grace many a Lakeland postcard, the valleys of Borrowdale and Buttermere are many people's idea of the quintessential Lake District landscape. Separated by the old Honister Pass – once the county's main slate-mining area – these twin valleys are hugely popular with walkers and hikers, with a network of walking trails and easy access to some of the region's highest peaks.

Borrowdale stretches for 6 miles from the western edge of Derwent Water to Honister

Pass. Buttermere runs northwest from Honister Pass along the shores of Buttermere Lake and Crummock Water towards Cockermouth.

Borrowdale

The main B5289 road tracks the edge of Derwent Water through the heart of the Borrowdale valley, dotted with small copses and rickety barns, and overlooked by the impressive peaks of Scaféll and Scaféll Pike.

A couple of miles south of Borrowdale is the small village of **Grange**. Nearby, the valley winds into the jagged ravine known as the **Jaws of Borrowdale**, a famous hiking spot with world-renowned views, especially from the 300m **Castle Crag**. From here, the road winds round into **Rosthwaithe**, a rural hamlet scattered with stone cottages, slate-roofed farmhouses and a couple of hotels.

SLEEPING & EATING

Derwent Water YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5792; derwentwater@yha.org.uk; Barrow House; dm £13.95; 🕒 Feb-Nov, weekends Nov-Jan; P 💻) This lakeside mansion 2 miles south of Keswick once belonged to the local aristocrat Joseph Pocklington. It's now perhaps the poshest hostel in the entire Lake District, with huge rooms, children's playgrounds, a great TV lounge and even a manmade waterfall.

Borrowdale YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5706; borrowdale@yha.org.uk; Longthwaite; dm £15.50; 🕒 Feb-Dec) A little way up the valley is this excellent purpose-built, timber-clad hostel that specialises in walking trips and outdoor activities.

Scaféll Hotel (☎ 77208; www.scafell.co.uk; d from £97; P ⊠) This unpretentious Lakeland inn is slightly more affordable than its upmarket neighbours, and still boasts the same magnificent Borrowdale views. It's a popular overnight stop for walkers, thanks to its unfussy rooms, inexpensive restaurant and the wonderful Riverside Bar – the village's only pub.

Borrowdale Gates Hotel (☎ 77204; www.borrowdale-gates.com; Grange; mains £16-22; d £134-180; P ⊠) This seriously swish country mansion was built as a private residence in the mid 19th-century, and has now been converted into the finest hotel in the valley. The unusual P-shaped layout means all the rooms have slightly different views (ranging from pleasant to utterly awe-inspiring), but they're all cosily finished with antique chairs, heavy bedspreads and luxurious curtains.

Hazel Bank Country House (☎ 77248; www.hazelbankhotel.co.uk; r £158-178; P ⊠) Another fine rural retreat built for a wealthy businessman in 1850, this award-winning stone-fronted hotel is accessed via its own humpbacked bridge and stands in spectacular private gardens. As you'd expect for the elevated price tag, the ambience is one of understated English luxury – silver trays, ruffled curtains and aristocratic furniture abound, and the service is first class.

Buttermere

From Honister pass the main road plunges down into the bowl-shaped Buttermere valley, skirting along the lakeshore all the way to Buttermere village, 4 miles from Honister and 9 miles from Keswick. From here, the B5289 cuts north along the eastern shore of Crummock Water.

Buttermere YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5736; buttermere@yha.org.uk; dm £17.50) is a spectacularly situated hostel in a slate-stone house above Buttermere Lake, with views of Red Pike and High Stile.

The **Fish Hotel** (☎ 70253; www.fish-hotel.co.uk; 2-night minimum stay d £144; P ⊠) is famous as the home of the legendary beauty Mary Robinson, the so-called 'Maid of Buttermere', whose admirers included Wordsworth, Coleridge and de Quincey, as well as notorious conman John Hatfield, who passed himself off as an army colonel and an MP in order to win her hand in marriage. Melvyn Bragg used the tale as the basis for his novel *The Maid Of Buttermere*.

The **Bridge Hotel** (☎ 70252; www.bridge-hotel.com; r incl dinner £130-190; P ⊠) has a choice of standard rooms and some seriously lavish suites, complete with hill-view balconies and antique furniture.

Getting There & Away

Bus 79 (the Borrowdale Rambler) provides a regular service (at least hourly) from Keswick bus station to Seatoller at the foot of the Honister Pass, with eight buses on Sunday.

From Easter to October bus 77/77A – the Honister Rambler – makes the round trip from Keswick to Buttermere via Borrowdale and the Honister Pass four times daily. The Honister Dayrider pass costs £6.

ULLSWATER & AROUND

☎ 017684

Stretching in a glassy arc for 7.5 miles between Pooley Bridge and Patterdale, the tranquil lake of Ullswater is the second largest in the Lakes after Windermere, and was one of Wordsworth's favourites. During an afternoon walk along the wooded shores of Ullswater with his sister Dorothy, William was inspired to write his 'Daffodils' poem, which begins with the immortal refrain, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud...' It's still an inspiring place, where quaint steamers chug along the lake against a backdrop of majestic hills and woodland groves, and although the western edge gets busy in summer, you can usually escape the traffic along the eastern side.

Ullswater Information Centre (☎ 82414; glenriddingtic@lake-district.gov.uk; Beckside car park; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) has plenty of tips on accommodation and local hikes.

Ullswater 'Steamers' (☎ 82229; www.ullswater-steamers.co.uk; adult return £7.40-10.30) plies the lake from Pooley Bridge to Glenridding via Howtown. The first paddle steamers were launched on Ullswater in 1859 but the current 19th-century vessels, *Lady* (in operation since 1887) and *Raven* (since 1889), have been converted to conventional power. A new steamer, the *Lady Wakefield*, was launched in September 2006.

Sleeping & Eating

Helvellyn YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5862; helvellyn@yha.org.uk; Greenside; dm £11.95; 🕒 Easter-Oct, phone ahead at other times) This high-altitude hostel is perched 174m above Glenridding and is mainly used by walkers setting out for Helvellyn. Guided walks can be arranged through the hostel staff.

Mosscrag (☎ 82500; www.mosscrag.co.uk; s £40, d £56-70; P ⊠) A reliable B&B near the banks of Glenridding Beck, offering pleasant rooms in peaceful shades of white and peach.

Pooley Bridge Inn (☎ 86215; www.pooleybridgeinn.co.uk; d £65-90; P ⊠) This comfy inn has a whiff of Alsatian atmosphere thanks to its hanging baskets, whitewashed exterior and wooden balconies. The rooms are pleasant and attractively rustic, with the odd brass horseshoe or watercolour print to cheer up the décor; 1st-floor bedrooms all have private balconies.

Glenridding Hotel (☎ 82228; www.bw-glenriddinghotel.co.uk; d £120-130; P ⊠ ♿) This modern hotel is owned by the Best Western chain, so the standard rooms are a little bland and anonymous; for something with a little more character, you can pay more for one of the feature rooms, which come with luxurious extras such as four-poster beds and duo baths.

Inn on the Lake (☎ 82444; www.innonthelakeullswater.co.uk; d £128-184; P ⊠ 💻) Huge, extravagant rooms, regal quilts, bubbling Jacuzzis and palatial beds sum up this lakeside beauty, by far the best hotel anywhere near Ullswater. The bedrooms offer a choice of mountain or lake views, and you'll be more than happy with either.

Park Foot Camping (☎ 86309; www.parkfootullswater.co.uk; Howtown Rd; sites £10-21) is nestled on the edge of Ullswater, a mile south of Pooley Bridge. Alternatively, try **Hillcroft Park** (☎ 486363; Roe Head Lane; sites from £10), a little closer to the village.

Getting There & Around

Bus 108 runs from Penrith to Patterdale stops at Pooley Bridge and Glenridding (five daily Monday to Saturday). Bus 517 runs from Bowness Pier to Glenridding (three daily late July to September, weekends only end March to July).

CUMBRIAN COAST

Most visitors never make the trek out to the Cumbrian coast, and with such a wealth of spectacular sights to discover around the Central Lakes, it's not really surprising. But they're missing out on one of the county's hidden gems – a sweeping panorama of gentle fields, coastal trails and sandy bays, dotted with some of Cumbria's oldest and most historic towns. The Edwardian holiday resort of Grange-over-Sands and the medieval village of Cartmel are both within easy reach of Morecambe Bay, on the county's southern coast, while on the western coast you'll find the Roman settlement of Ravenglass – starting point for the classic La'al Ratty steam railway – and the ancient port of Whitehaven, as well as the controversial nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Getting Around

The Cumbrian Coast railway line loops 120 miles from Carlisle to Lancaster (both on the main line between London and Glasgow). Trains run hourly, and a single costs £21.

CARTMEL PRIORY

The tiny village of Cartmel is known for three things – its beautiful 12th-century priory, its miniature racecourse and its world-famous sticky toffee pudding, which is produced at the **Cartmel Village Shop** (☎ 015395-36201; www.stickytoffeepudding.co.uk; The Square; ⏲ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) and sold all over Cumbria.

Cartmel Priory (☎ 015395-36261; ⏲ 9am-5.30pm May-Oct, 9am-3.30pm Nov-Apr) was one of the few priories to escape demolition during the dissolution. Light pours in through the glorious 15th-century **east window**, illuminating the many tombs set into the flagstoned floor; look out for the engravings of skulls and hourglasses, intended to remind the pious of their own inescapable mortality.

Bus 532 runs from Grange to Cartmel (30 minutes, four daily).

FURNESS ABBEY

The rosy ruins of **Furness Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01229-823420; admission £3.40; ⏲ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar) are 1.5 miles north of Barrow-in-Furness and 8.5 miles from Ulverston. Founded in the 12th century, the abbey became one of the most powerful in the north of England, but finally met an ignominious end in 1537 during the dissolution; only the bell-tower and part of the north and south transepts are still standing. An audio guide is included in the admission price.

Bus 6 or 6A from Ulverston to Barrow-in-Furness passes by the abbey.

RAVENGLASS & AROUND

It's difficult to imagine the tiny village of Ravenglass, a quiet cluster of seaside houses 27 miles north of Barrow, as an important Roman port. The Romans were drawn to its sheltered harbour, but all that remains of their substantial fort are the walls of a 4th-century **bath house**, half a mile from the train station down a signposted track.

The **Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway** (☎ 01229-717171; www.ravenglass-railway.co.uk; adult £9), affectionately known as La'al Ratty, chugs along a beautiful 7-mile track into Eskdale and the foothills of the Lake District mountains. There's an interesting **museum** exploring the history of the railway beside the car park.

WORTH THE TRIP

Ratty Arms (☎ 01229-717676; ⏲ daily) Stepping into this extraordinary pub on the platform of Ravenglass Station is like stumbling onto the set of *Brief Encounter*. It's a relic from a bygone age; sepia-tinted photos and faded adverts cover the pub's tobacco-stained walls, railway memorabilia is scattered around the main bar, and there's a little galleried dining area that looks for all the world like it's been lifted straight from a 1950s train carriage. There's local ale on tap and a daily blackboard filled with no-nonsense pub food, but it's the unforgettable atmosphere that's the real attraction. All aboard...

A mile south of Ravenglass is **Muncaster Castle** (☎ 01229-717614; www.muncaster.co.uk; gardens £6.50, castle £2.50; ⏲ gardens 10.30am-6pm or dusk, castle noon-5pm Sun-Fri), built around the original 14th-century *pele* tower and later expanded during the 19th century. Its celebrated features include an imposing great hall and an extraordinary octagonal library; it's also stuffed with spooks, including the spirit of Tom Fool, once a court jester at the castle. The surrounding gardens also contain an ornamental maze and an owl centre.

Five miles from Ravenglass is **Sellafield**, Britain's largest nuclear reprocessing plant. Long a source of controversy, Sellafield is still a huge local employer, though it's scheduled to be decommissioned over the next decade. In the meantime, the **visitor centre** (☎ 019467-27027; www.sellafield.com; admission free; ⏲ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) does its best to bring out nuclear power's more entertaining side.

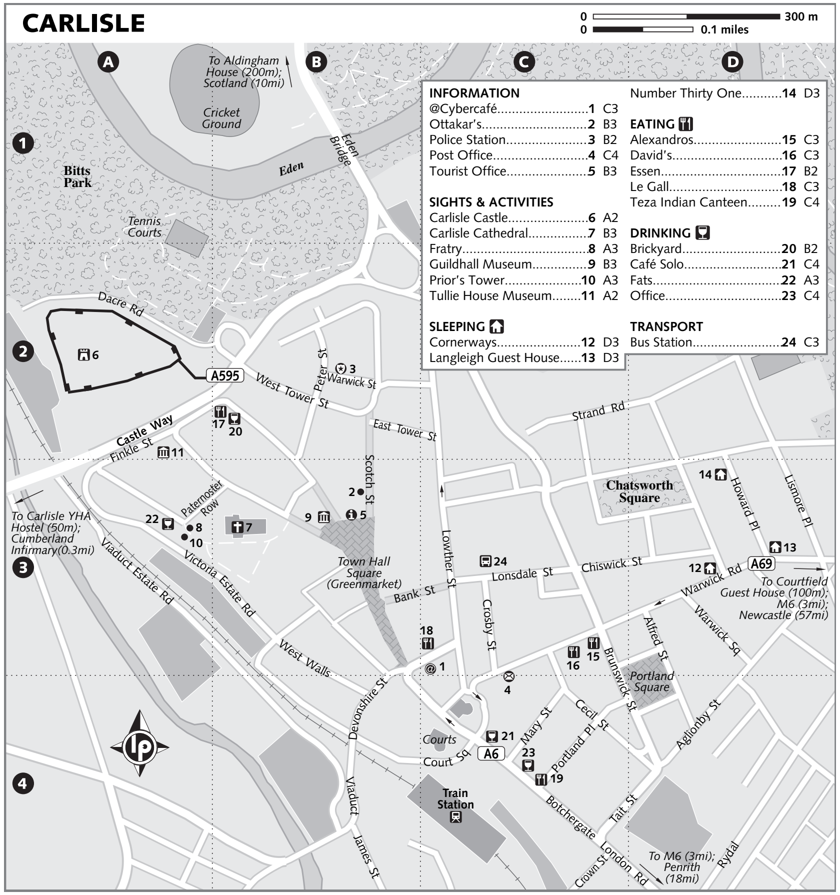
Ravenglass is on the Cumbrian Coast Line, with frequent links north and south along the coast. Bus 6 from Whitehaven stops at Ravenglass and terminates at Muncaster (70 minutes, five daily). Bus X6 travels the same route on Sunday (four daily).

NORTH & EAST CUMBRIA

Many visitors speed through the northern and eastern reaches of Cumbria in a headlong dash for the Central Lakes, and if you're arriving by road or rail, chances are you'll skip this region altogether. But that's a shame, as this is an area that's well worth exploring in its own right – a bleakly beautiful landscape of isolated farms, barren heaths and solid hilltop towns, cut through by the Roman-built barrier of Hadrian's Wall.

CARLISLE

☎ 01228 / pop 70,409


CARLISLE
0 300 m
0 0.1 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To Aldingham House (200m); Scotland (10mi)
Cricket Ground
Eden
Eden Bridge
Bitts Park
Tennis Courts
Dacre Rd
A595
West Tower St
Peter St
Warwick St
Castle Way
Finkle St
East Tower St
Strand Rd
Scotch St
Paternoster Row
Chatsworth Square
Howard Pl
Lismore Pl
To Carlisle YHA Hostel (50m); Cumberland Infirmary (0.3mi)
Viaduct Estate Rd
Victoria Estate Rd
Town Hall Square (Greenmarket)
Lowther St
Lonsdale St
Chiswick St
Bank St
A69
Warwick Rd
To Courtfield Guest House (100m); M6 (3mi); Newcastle (57mi)
Crosby St
West Walls
Warwick Sq
Alfred St
Brunswick St
Portland Square
Devonshire St
Cecil St
Mary St
Portland Pl
Aglionby St
Courts
Court Sq
A6
Train Station
Viaduct
James St
Botchergate
Tait St
London Rd
Crown St
To M6 (3mi); Penrith (18mi)
Rydal

INFORMATION		
@Cybercafé	1	C3
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Police Station	3	B2
Post Office	4	C4
Tourist Office	5	B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Carlisle Castle	6	A2
Carlisle Cathedral	7	B3
Fratry	8	A3
Guildhall Museum	9	B3
Prior's Tower	10	A3
Tullie House Museum	11	A2
SLEEPING		
Cornerways	12	D3
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EATING		
Alexandros	15	C3
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Brickyard	20	B2
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TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	24	C3

Flung out on the very edge of England, the fortress city of Carlisle is certainly no stranger to conflict: throughout its 2000-year history it's been the site of more sieges, skirmishes and sackings than almost anywhere else in the country. The city's massive castle still stands as a reminder of its tempestuous past. Carlisle is also home to Cumbria's only cathedral, built from the same rosy red sandstone that characterises the castle and many of the city's houses; during the 18th and 19th centuries, Carlisle became a bustling hub of the Industrial Revolution, and many of its neat redbrick terraces grew up to house the huge numbers of workers needed to keep the factories and mills running. These days, most of the heavy industries have moved on, and Carlisle is better known for its lively nightlife and busy shops, and as a handy base for exploring the Northern Lakes.

History

A Celtic camp or *caer* (preserved in the name of Carlisle) provided an early military station for the Romans. After the construction of Hadrian's Wall, Carlisle became the Romans' administrative centre in the northwest. Following centuries of intermittent conflict between Picts, Saxons and Viking raiders, the Normans seized Carlisle from the Scots in 1092, and William Rufus began construction of the castle and town walls.

The English continued to develop Carlisle as a military stronghold throughout the Middle Ages, constructing the city walls, citadels and the great gates. During the Civil War, Royalist Carlisle was an important strategic base; the city was eventually taken, battered and starving, by the Roundhead Scottish army after a nine-month siege.

Peace only came to Carlisle with the Restoration. The city's future as an industrial centre was sealed with the arrival of the railways and the first cotton mills during the Industrial Revolution.

Orientation

From the M6, the main routes into town are London Rd and Warwick Rd. The train station is south of the city centre, a 10-minute walk from Town Hall Sq (also known as Greenmarket) and the tourist office. The bus station is on Lonsdale St, about 250m east. Most of the town's B&Bs are dotted along Victoria Pl and Warwick Rd.

Information

@Cybercafé (☎ 512308; www.atcybercafe.co.uk; 8-10 Devonshire St; per hr £3; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Sun)

Cumberland Infirmary (☎ 523444; Newtown Rd) Half a mile west of the city centre.

Ottakar's (☎ 542300; 66 Scotch St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Large chain bookshop stocking new titles and local books.

Police station (☎ 528191) Just north of Town Hall Sq off Scotch St.

Post office (20-34 Warwick Rd)

Tourist office (☎ 625600; www.historic-carlisle.org.uk; Greenmarket; internet access per 15min £1; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun) Offers a free accommodation-booking service for personal callers.

Sights & Activities

CARLISLE CASTLE

English Heritage's rust-red **Carlisle Castle** (EH; ☎ 591922; admission £4.10; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) was built on the site of Celtic and Roman fortresses. The Norman keep was built in 1092 by William Rufus, and Mary Queen of Scots was briefly imprisoned here in 1568 after losing the Scottish throne. A maze of passages and chambers winds around the castle, and there are great views from the ramparts – you can also see some stones in the dungeon that prisoners licked to keep themselves hydrated. The castle also houses the **Kings Own Royal Border Regiment Museum**, which explores the history of Cumbria's Infantry Regiment. There are daily castle tours (£1.50) from April to September.

CARLISLE CATHEDRAL

The city's red-sandstone **cathedral** (☎ 548151; donation £2; 🕒 7.30am-6.15pm Mon-Sat, 7.45am-5pm Sun) was originally constructed as a priory church in 1122. During the 1644–45 siege by parliamentarian troops, two-thirds of the nave was torn down to help repair the city wall and castle. Serious restoration didn't begin until 1853, but a surprising amount survives, including the east window and part of the original Norman nave.

Surrounding the cathedral are other priory relics, including the 16th-century **Fratry** and the **Prior's Tower**.

TULLIE HOUSE MUSEUM

This excellent **museum** (☎ 534781; www.tulliehouse.co.uk; Castle St; admission £5.20; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) brings Carlisle's history to life with exhibitions exploring the foundation of the city, life under Roman rule and the development of modern Carlisle. The museum's collection of exhibits includes a Bronze Age spear-mould, a Saxon sword and lots of artefacts recovered from local Viking burial sites and Hadrian's Wall.

GUILDHALL MUSEUM

This tiny **museum** (☎ 532781; Greenmarket; admission free; 🕒 noon-4.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) is housed in a 15th-century town house that was later used by Carlisle's trade guilds. The various exhibits dotted around its wonky floors include a ceremonial mace, the city's stocks and an intriguing section of exposed wall showing the building's traditional wattle-and-daub construction.

Tours

Open Book Visitor Guiding (☎ 670578; www.greatguidedtours.co.uk) offers tours of Carlisle and the surrounding area from April to September, including visits to Carlisle Castle and Hadrian's Wall.

Sleeping

Carlisle YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5752; dee.carruthers@unn.ac.uk; Bridge Lane; dm £17.50; 🕒 Jul-Sep) The old Theakston Brewery has been converted into student digs for the university; rooms are usually available during the summer holidays.

Courtfield Guest House (☎ 522767; mdawes@courtfieldhouse.fsnet.co.uk; 169 Warwick Rd; s/d from £25/50; ☒) Another fine redbrick house in the guesthouse-heavy area around Warwick Rd, distinguished by its great-value rooms and friendly owners.

Cornerways (☎ 521733; www.cornerwaysguesthouse.co.uk; 107 Warwick Rd; s/d from £30/50; Ⓟ ☒) This Grade II–listed corner house still boasts its original Victorian tiled hallway and much of its original cornicing; the rooms are simple and inviting, with smart quilted bedspreads and pine furniture, although not all come with en suite.

Langleigh Guest House (☎ 530440; www.langleighhouse.co.uk; 6 Howard Pl; s/d £30/60; Ⓟ ☒) Victorian grandeur is the watchword at this beautifully appointed B&B, which positively brims with polished furniture, leather armchairs, oil paintings and gilt mirrors. More rooms are offered in a second town house along the street.

Aldingham House (☎ 522554; www.aldinghamhouse.co.uk; 1 Eden Mount; s/d £50/75; Ⓟ ☒ 💻) Just north of the city centre, this lovely B&B has three bedrooms splashed in checks, spots and stripes and furnished with rich fabrics and muted lighting. The sumptuous breakfast includes Loch Fyne kippers, crumpets and fresh smoothies.

Number Thirty One (☎ 597080; www.number31.freeservers.com; 31 Howard Pl; s/d from £60/85; Ⓟ ☒) An utterly ravishing B&B-cum–boutique hotel, with three bedrooms furnished with invention, wit and idiosyncratic style. Rooms range from an Oriental den to a cool blue boudoir, and the house is crammed with brassy antiques, period photos and Victorian ephemera. Why can't all B&Bs be like this?

Eating

Alexandros (☎ 592227; 68 Warwick Rd; meze £3-6, mains £9-14; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) A lively Greek restaurant serving up huge, authentic plates of meze, seared chicken kebabs and grilled octopus.

Le Gall (☎ 818388; 7 Devonshire St; mains £5-8; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Don't let the name fool you – this buzzy little bistro doesn't just do Franco-flavoured cuisine. The eclectic menu takes in flavours from practically everywhere, so you should be able to find something to take your fancy, whether it's an Italian panini or a Mexican fajita.

Essen (☎ 536336; 6-8 Fisher St; mains from £6; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This groovy new bar-diner is the newest entry on Carlisle's culinary scene, split over two floors and decked out in spare, contemporary style. There's a light lunch menu or a more extensive evening menu offering mainly fish, chicken and fusion flavours.

Teza Indian Canteen (☎ 525111; 4a English Gate Plaza; mains £8-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The good old Indian comes crashing into the 20th century at this utterly contemporary restaurant. Forget flock wallpaper, fish-tanks and piped sitars – here it's all about clean lines, industrial styling and wire-frame chairs, with a menu of Indian standards supplemented by 'contemporary mains' such as *narangi nu* duck, marinated in cloves and orange juice.

David's (☎ 523578; 62 Warwick Rd; mains £10-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Arguably Carlisle's top table, this refined French-British restaurant offers a carefully composed menu of *haute cuisine* dishes such as roast venison and monkfish in Parma ham.

Drinking

Loads of designer bars and drinking holes have sprung up around the newly renovated Botchergate area, so head there if you're after some after-dark action.

Office (☎ 404303; Botchergate) Sleek and chic, this is one of the favourite hang-outs for Carlisle's hip set, kitted out in urban style with cube lights, razor-sharp tables and a massive industrial bar. Breakbeat, hip-hop and soul spin on the turntables.

Fats (☎ 511774; 48 Abbey St; 🕒 11am-11pm) Hidden away near the cathedral, this swish open-plan bar is another fine place for a night on the tiles, with a huge menu of 'classic' and 'bespoke' cocktails.

Café Solo (☎ 631600; 1 Botchergate) For something rather less exclusive, this corner coffee bar has a vaguely Spanish vibe and serves great coffee by day, and cool Sol beers by night.

Brickyard (☎ 512220; 14 Fisher St) Carlisle's main venue for gigs and live music, housed in the former Memorial Hall.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Carlisle is Cumbria's main transport hub. Direct National Express buses travel to London (£30.50, six hours, two direct daily, with extra buses via Preston and Birmingham), Glasgow (£15.60, two hours, 13 daily) and Manchester (£22, three hours, six daily).

Local buses include bus 554 to Keswick (one hour, three daily), where you can catch the 555 LakesLink into the central Lake District. The 104 travels to Penrith (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday), and Bus AD122 (the Hadrian's Wall bus; six daily late May to late September) connects Hexham and Carlisle.

TRAIN

Regular trains run from London Euston (£111, four hours, nine to 12 daily).

Carlisle is the terminus for five scenic railways (call ☎ 0845 748 4950 for timetable details and information on Day Ranger passes):

Cumbrian Coast Line Follows the coastline to Lancaster (£21, 3½ hours), with views over the Irish Sea.
Glasgow–Carlisle Line The main route to Glasgow passes through spectacular Scottish landscape (£30.50, 1½ hours).
Lakes Line Branches off the main north–south line at Oxenholme near Kendal for Windermere (£17.50, 1½ hours).
Settle–Carlisle Line Cuts southeast across the Yorkshire Dales (£14.45, 1½ hours).
Tyne Valley Line Follows Hadrian's Wall to Newcastle-upon-Tyne (£10.60, 1½ hours).

PENRITH

☎ 01768 / pop 14,966

Nestled at the head of the lush Eden Valley, the sturdy redbrick market town of Penrith was once the capital of Cumbria, and it's still an important commercial centre, with a bustling high street and a network of colonnaded arcades packed with outdoors shops, cafés, tearooms and traditional grocery stores. High above the town stands Beacon Fell, where beacons have been lit in times of emergency since the days of Henry VIII, and where sentries were once posted to warn of Border raids.

Information

Library (☎ 242100; St Andrew's Churchyard; 🕐 Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 867466; pen.tic@eden.gov.uk; Middlegate; 🕐 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.45pm Sun) Also houses a small town museum.

Sights

Penrith Castle (🕐 7.30am-9pm Easter-Oct, 7.30am-4.30pm Oct-Easter) was originally built by William Strickland (later Bishop of Carlisle and Archbishop of Canterbury) to resist Scottish raids, one of which razed the town in 1345. The castle was later expanded by Richard, Duke of Gloucester – better known as Richard III – but fell into disrepair in the 16th century.

Penrith's name derives from an old Celtic word meaning 'red fell', and most of the town's buildings are built from the same rust-red sandstone, including the 18th-century **St Andrew's Church**. A legendary giant (the 'rightful king of all Cumbria') is said to be buried in the churchyard, but the stone pillars that supposedly mark his grave are actually the weathered remains of Celtic crosses.

Sleeping

Hornby Hall (☎ 891114; www.hornbyhall.co.uk; Brougham; s/d £30/80, tw £50-76; 🅿 ☒) Three miles south of Penrith in the hamlet of Brougham, this amber-stoned 16th-century mansion house still has a stunning assortment of medieval and Victorian features, including a huge dining hall, a massive cast-iron cooking range and a spiral stone staircase that dates from the days of Columbus. The rooms are quaint, sunny and delightfully simple.

Brandelhow (☎ 864470; www.brandelhowguesthouse.co.uk; 1 Portland Pl; s £30, d or tw £60; ☒) Just a few rooms are on offer at this dignified town house at the head of Portland Pl, all furnished in fairly typical style with lashings of pine and magnolia paint, as well as the odd antique rocking chair and wrought-iron bed. Tea and homemade cake greets guests on their arrival – try the Bootle gingerbread.

Brooklands (☎ 863395; www.brooklandsguesthouse.com; 2 Portland Pl; s £30-35 d £60-70; ☒) This three-floored Victorian residence houses an array of top-drawer rooms; some feature huge pine four-posters and scarlet fabric bedspreads, while others opt for more modest tints of cream and apple green. Best of all is the flashy, fluffy-pillowed suite, which comes with brass bedstead and wall-mounted plasma TV.

George Hotel (☎ 862696; www.georgehotelpenrith.co.uk; Devonshire St; s £55-71, d £96-156; 🅿 ☒) Smack bang in the middle of town is Penrith's historic coaching inn. Pelmeted drapes, rich country furnishings and thick carpets find their way into every room, although they lack that all-important personal touch.

Eating

No 15 Café Bar (☎ 867453; 15 Victoria Rd; lunches £6-8; 🕐 daily) Fifteen reasons to visit this café-bar-gallery are chalked up on the blackboard behind the counter, but you won't need much persuasion. It's Penrith's best place for lunch, cakes and coffee, with a light-filled dining room and displays of local photography and artwork.

George Hotel (☎ 862696; Devonshire St; mains from £11; 🕐 lunch & dinner) For a sit-down meal in Penrith, you can't do much better than the good old George, which has been feeding hungry wayfarers for well over two centuries. Country dishes are very much the mainstays here, served up in a semiformal dining room embellished with candles, country prints and Victorian frosted glass.

our pick **Yanwath Gate Inn** (☎ 862886; Yanwath; mains £14-19) Two miles south of Penrith, and affectionately known to locals as the Yat, this wonderful 17th-century inn has scooped up a clutch of national pub awards for its imaginative cooking and creative use of local produce – Fell-bred lamb, organic guinea fowl and Bessyback trout all feature on the varied menu, and the interior is crammed with oak-beamed, stone-walled character.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is northeast of the centre, off Sandgate. Bus 104 runs between Penrith and Carlisle (45 minutes, 16 daily Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday).

Bus X4/X5 connects Penrith to the Lakes and the Cumbrian coast hourly Monday to Saturday and six times on Sunday, calling at Keswick and Cockermouth before terminating at Workington.

TRAIN

Penrith has frequent connections to Carlisle (£6.40, 20 minutes, hourly) and Lancaster (£11.50, 50 to 60 minutes, hourly).

AROUND PENRITH

Rheged Discovery Centre

Cunningly disguised as a Lakeland hill 2 miles west of Penrith, **Rheged** (☎ 01768-686000; www.rheged.com; 1 film or attraction £5.95; 🕐 10am-6pm) houses a large-screen IMAX cinema and the Helly Hansen National Mountaineering Exhibition, which includes a collection of artefacts belonging to George Mallory (the British mountaineer who died climbing Everest in 1924).

The frequent bus X4/X5 bus between Penrith and Workington stops at the centre.

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Countrywide practical information is given in this Directory chapter. For details on specific areas, flip to the relevant regional chapters.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Britain is as varied as the sights you visit, and – whatever your budget – is likely to be your main expense. From hip hotels and grand castles to tiny cottages and basic barns, the wide choice is all part of the attraction, and from our research across the country we've made the numerous recommendations throughout this book.

B&Bs & Guesthouses

The B&B (bed and breakfast) is a great British institution. Basically, you get a room in somebody's house, and at smaller places you'll really feel part of the family. Larger B&Bs may have four or five rooms and more facilities. 'Guesthouse' is sometimes just another name for a B&B, although they can be larger, with higher rates.

In country areas your B&B might be in a village or isolated farm; in cities it's usually a suburban house. Wherever, facilities usually reflect price – for around £15 to £20 per person you get a simple bedroom and share the bathroom. For around £25 you get extras

PRACTICALITIES

- Be ready for a bizarre mix of metric and imperial measures in Britain; for example, petrol is sold by the litre, but road-sign distances are given in miles.
- Read up on current events in the *Sun* or *Mirror* tabloids, or get a more incisive view in the (from right to left, politically) *Telegraph, Times, Independent* or *Guardian* quality papers.
- Relish the satire, then cringe at tales of corruption, in weekly no-frills mag *Private Eye.*
- Use plugs with three flat pins to connect appliances to the 220V (50Hz AC) power supply.
- Turn on the TV, and watch some of the finest programmes in the world from the multichannel BBC, closely followed by boundary-pushing Channel 4.
- Tune into BBC radio for a wide range of shows, and no adverts. Half the households in Britain have digital radio and TV, but for those still on analogue, the wavelengths are: BBC Radio 1 (98.8MHz FM); Radio 2 (88-92MHz FM); BBC Radio 3 (91.3 MHz FM); Radio 4 (93.5MHz FM). For content details see p67. The *Today* show on Radio 4 (mornings to 9am) is a national institution, the aural equivalent of browsing through the papers then personally grilling the politicians. National commercial stations include Virgin Radio (1215Hz MW) and pleasantly nonhighbrow classical specialist Classic FM (100-102MHz FM).

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

like TV or 'hospitality tray' (kettle, cups, tea, coffee) and a private bathroom – either down the hall or en suite.

B&B prices are usually quoted per person, based on two people sharing a room. Solo travellers have to search for single rooms and pay a 20% to 50% premium. Some B&Bs simply won't take single people (unless you pay the full double-room price), especially in summer.

Here are some more B&B tips:

- Advance reservations are always preferred at B&Bs, and essential during popular periods. Many require a minimum two nights at weekends.
- Many B&Bs are nonsmoking or only allow smoking in the lounge.
- Rates may rise at busy times and differ from those quoted in this book.
- If a B&B is full, owners may recommend another place nearby (possibly a private house taking occasional guests, not in tourist listings).
- In cities, some B&Bs are for long-term residents or people on welfare; they don't take passing tourists.
- In country areas, most B&Bs cater for walkers and cyclists, but some don't, so let them know if you'll be turning up with dirty boots or wheels.
- Some places reduce rates for longer stays (two or three nights).
- Most B&Bs serve enormous breakfasts; some also offer packed lunches (around £3) and evening meals (around £10).
- If you're in a hurry, B&Bs may give discounts for not having breakfast (possibly saving £5), but this is unusual. Bed-only rates are more common at ferry ports.
- If you're on a flexible itinerary and haven't booked in advance, most towns have a main drag or area where the B&Bs congregate; those with spare rooms hang up a 'Vacancies' sign.
- When booking, check where your B&B actually is. In country areas, postal addresses include the nearest town, which may be 20 miles away – important if you're walking! For those on foot, some B&B owners will pick you up by car for a small charge.

Bunkhouses & Camping Barns

A bunkhouse is a simple place to stay, handy for walkers, cyclists or anyone on a budget in the countryside. It will usually have a communal sleeping area and bathroom, heating, and cooking stoves, but you provide the sleeping bag and possibly cooking gear. Most charge £7.50 to £10 per person per night.

Camping barns are even more basic: usually converted farm buildings, providing shelter for walkers and visitors to country areas. They have sleeping platforms, a cooking area and basic toilets outside. Take everything you'd need to camp except the tent. Charges are around £4 per person.

Most bunkhouses and camping barns are privately owned, but the **Youth Hostels Association** (www.yha.org.uk) handles information and reservations on their behalf. Other bunkhouses and camping barns are listed in the *Independent Hostels* guidebook and website (www.independenthostelguide.co.uk). For more details see the boxed text, opposite.

Camping

The opportunities for camping in Britain are numerous – great if you're on a tight budget or simply enjoy fresh air and the great outdoors. In rural areas, camping grounds (called camp sites in Britain) range from farmers' fields with a tap and a basic toilet, costing around £2 per night, to smarter affairs with hot showers and many other facilities, charging £5 or more per person. For an idea of just how smart some can be, we recommend *Cool Camping, England* by Jonathan Knight, a coffee-table book listing 40 exceptional camp sites, and proving that sleeping under canvas doesn't need to be damp and uncomfortable any more. Volumes covering Wales and Scotland are planned.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

To help you choose where to stay, most sleeping sections throughout this book are divided into three price bands:

- Budget – under £20 per person per night
- Midrange – £20 to £50
- Top end – over £50

The exception is accommodation in London, where 'budget' in this book means up to £80 per person per night, midrange is £80 to £150, and top end is over £150.

ACCOMMODATION CONTACTS

Locally focused accommodation websites (eg Where to Stay Wessex, Reservations London) are listed in the individual regional chapters. For a countrywide view an excellent first stop is **Stilwell's** (www.stilwell.co.uk) huge user-friendly database for independent tourists, listing holiday cottages, B&Bs, hotels, camp sites and hostels. Stillwell's is not an agency – once you've found what you want, you deal with the cottage or B&B owner direct. From the website you can also order a hard-copy colour holiday cottage brochure. Other good agencies include **Hoseasons Country Cottages** (☎ 01502-502588; www.hoseasons.co.uk) and **Bed & Breakfast Nationwide** (www.bedandbreakfastnationwide.com), both with websites and colour brochures.

Recommended guidebooks include the annually published *Good Hotel Guide* and the Which? *Good Bed & Breakfast Guide*. Both are genuinely independent – hotels have to be good, they can't pay to get in. Both books are available in good bookshops and from online bookshops, and the Which? guide is available direct from www.which.co.uk.

For details on hostels in England and Wales, contact the **Youth Hostels Association** (YHA; ☎ 0870 770 6113, 01629-592708; www.yha.org.uk). The YHA website also has information about bunkhouses, camping barns and YHA camp sites – even places where you can rent a tepee. In Scotland, contact the **Scottish Youth Hostels Association** (SYHA; ☎ 01786-891400; www.syha.org.uk). The **Independent Hostel Guide** (www.independenthostelguide.co.uk) covers hundreds of hostels in Britain and beyond, and is by far the best listing available. It's also available as a handy annually updated book (£4.95) at hostels or direct from the website. North of the border, there's the excellent **Association of Independent Scottish Hostels** (www.hostel-scotland.co.uk).

If you're planning to camp extensively, or tour Britain in a camper van (motor home), it's well worth joining the friendly and well-organised **Camping & Caravanning Club** (☎ 0845 130 7631; www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk), which owns almost 100 camp sites and lists thousands more in the excellent and invaluable *Big Sites Book* (free to members). Annual membership costs £30 and includes discounted rates on club sites and various other services – including insurance and special rates for cars on ferries.

Hostels

There are two types of hostel in Britain: those run by the Youth Hostels Association (YHA) or Scottish Youth Hostels Association (SYHA), and independent hostels. You'll find them in rural areas, towns and cities; they're aimed at all types of traveller – whether you're a long-distance walker or touring by car – and you don't have to be young or single to use them.

INDEPENDENT HOSTELS

Britain's independent hostels and backpacker hostels offer a great welcome. In rural areas, some are little more than simple bunkhouses (charging around £5), while others are almost up to B&B standard, charging £15 or more.

In cities, backpacker hostels are perfect for young budget travellers. Most are open 24/7, with a lively atmosphere, good range of rooms (doubles or dorms), bar, café, internet and laundry. Prices are around £15 for a dorm bed, or £20 to £35 for a bed in a private room.

YHA & SYHA HOSTELS

Many years ago, YHA and SYHA hostels had a reputation for austerity, but today they're a great option for budget travellers. Some are purpose-built, but many are in cottages and country houses – even castles – often in wonderful locations. Facilities include showers, drying room, lounge and equipped self-catering kitchen. Sleeping is in dormitories, but many hostels also have twin or four-bed family rooms, some with private bathroom.

To stay, you must join the YHA (£16 per year; £10 for under-26s), SYHA (£8; £4 for under-18s) or another Hostelling International (HI) organisation. Accommodation charges vary – small hostels cost around £10, larger hostels with more facilities are £13 to £19. SYHA hostels in Edinburgh and Glasgow cost from £15, while London's excellent YHA hostels cost from £25. Students, under-26s and over-60s get discounts. If you're not a YHA/SYHA/HI member you pay around £3 extra per night in England and Wales, and about £1 extra in Scotland.

Most hostels offer meals, and charge about £4 for breakfasts and packed lunches, and around £6 for good-value three-course dinners.

Hostels tend to have complicated opening times and days, especially out of tourist season, so check these before turning up. Smaller rural hostels may close from 10am to 5pm. Reservations are usually possible, and you can often pay in advance by credit card. For full details see www.yha.org.uk and www.syha.org.uk. For more details see the boxed text, p951.

One final warning: the YHA constantly monitors its hostels, and sometimes has to close them down – because they've become too expensive to operate, to old to maintain, or simply don't get enough guests. All the YHA hostels listed were open at the time of research, but be prepared for some more to close down (and some new hostels to open) over the lifetime of this book.

Hotels

A hotel in Britain can be a simple place with a few rooms or a huge country house with fancy facilities, grand staircases, acres of grounds and the requisite row of stag-heads on the wall. Charges vary as much as quality and atmosphere, with singles/doubles costing £30/40 to £100/150 or beyond. More money doesn't always mean a better hotel, though – whatever your budget, some are excellent value while others overcharge. Throughout this book, we guide you to the best choices.

If all you want is a place to put your head down, and you're unconcerned about style or ambience, chain hotels (often along motorways and busy roads) can offer bargains. For example, **Travelodge** (www.travelodge.co.uk) offers rooms at variable prices based on demand: on a quiet night in November twin-bed rooms with private bathroom start from £15, and at the height of the tourist season you'll pay up to £45. Other chains include **Hotel Formule 1** (www.hotelformule1.com), with rooms from £25.

In London and other cities you can find similar places – motorway-style, in the centre of town – that can be very good value, although totally lacking in atmosphere. These include **Premier Travel Inn** (www.premiertravelinn.com) and **easyHotel** (www.easyhotel.com), the latter with no-frills airline-style rates and rooms.

Pubs & Inns

As well as selling drinks, many pubs and inns offer lodging and breakfast, particularly in country areas. Staying in a pub can be good fun – you're automatically at the centre of the community – although accommodation varies greatly, from stylish suites to threadbare rooms aimed at (and last used by) 1950s commercial salesmen. You'll pay around £15 per person at the cheap end, and around £30 for something better. An advantage for solo tourists is that pubs are more likely to have single rooms.

If a pub does B&B, it normally does evening meals, served in the bar or adjoining restaurant. Breakfast may also be served in the bar the next morning – not always enhanced by the smell of stale beer.

For more information on pubs, see p107.

Rental Accommodation

If you want to slow down and get to know a place better, renting for a week or two can be ideal. Choose from neat town apartments, quaint old houses or converted farms (although always called 'cottages'), all with bedrooms, bathroom, lounge and equipped kitchen.

REACH FOR THE STARS

As in most countries, most hotels and B&Bs (and even hostels) in Britain are awarded stars by the national tourist board and main motoring organisations, according to their levels of quality and service. Since 2005, and for the first time ever, star-ratings are unified (although it was pretty rare to find a place earning, say, five stars from one body and only three from another), but travellers in Britain shouldn't worry *too* much about big numbers as many one- or two-star places are small and owner-managed, where guests can feel especially welcome. Conversely, some five-star places have loads of facilities but can feel a bit impersonal. In addition, because they have to pay to register with the tourist board before they're awarded any stars at all, many B&Bs don't bother, even though their service is absolutely fine. The moral: if you use official accommodation lists as your only source, you might miss out on a real gem.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND?

Britain has a beguiling selection of hotels and cottages, and throughout this book we list many that stand out above the crowd. To widen the choice still further, and maybe discover a gem for yourself, contact the **Landmark Trust** (☎ 01628-825925; www.landmarktrust.org.uk), an architectural charity that rents historic buildings; your options include medieval castles, Napoleonic forts and 18th-century follies.

Another option is **Distinctly Different** (www.distinctlydifferent.co.uk), specialising in unusual, bizarre or even vaguely risqué accommodation. Can't sleep at night? How about a former funeral parlour? Need to spice up your romance? Then go for the converted brothel or the 'proudly phallic' lighthouse. Feeling brave? We have just the haunted inn for you, sir.

Come back safely down to earth with the final option. The **National Trust** (NT; www.nationaltrust.org.uk) has more than 300 holiday cottages and 80 B&Bs, many on the land of NT-managed stately homes and working farms, in some of the finest locations in the country.

At busy times (especially July and August) you'll need to book ahead, and cottages for four people cost from around £200 to £300 per week. At quieter times £150 to £180 is more usual, and you may be able to rent for a long weekend. There are numerous cottage booking agencies with brochures and websites; Stilwell's (see the boxed text, p951) is a great place to start.

University Accommodation

Many universities offer student accommodation to visitors during July and August vacations. You usually get a functional single bedroom with private bathroom, and self-catering flats are also available. Prices range from £10 to £30 per person. There's no central website, so you need to ask at the tourist offices in individual cities and towns.

BUSINESS HOURS

Museums & Sights

When it comes to sightseeing, large museums and major places of interest are usually open every day. Some smaller places will open just five or six days per week, usually including Saturday and Sunday, but may be closed on Monday and/or Tuesday. Much depends on the time of year, too; places of interest will open daily in high season, but may open just at weekends (or keep shorter hours) in quieter periods.

Pubs, Bars & Clubs

Pubs in towns and country areas in England and Wales usually open from 11am to 11pm Sunday to Thursday, sometimes to midnight Friday and Saturday. Most open all day, although some may shut from 3pm to 6pm. In Scotland, pubs tend to close later; 1am is normal, and 3am is not unusual. Throughout this book, we don't list pub opening and closing times unless they vary significantly from these hours.

In cities, some pubs open until midnight or later, but it's mostly bars and clubs which have taken advantage of new licensing laws in England and Wales ('the provision of late-night refreshment', as it's officially called) to stay open to 1am, 2am or later. As every place is different, we list opening hours for bars and clubs.

Restaurants & Cafés

Restaurants in Britain open either for lunch (about noon to 3pm) *and* dinner (about 7.30pm to 10pm in smaller towns, up to 11pm or midnight in cities, as early as 8pm in country areas), or they might open for lunch *or* dinner only – depending on the location. Restaurants are usually open every day of the week, although some may close on Sunday evening, or all day Monday.

Cafés and teashops also vary according to location. In towns and cities, cafés may open from 7am, providing breakfast for people on their way to work. Others stay open until 5pm or 6pm. In country areas, cafés and teashops will open in time for lunch, and may stay open until 7pm or later in the summer, catering to tourists or hikers.

Throughout this book, many restaurants and cafés are listed and reviewed, and we indicate if they're open for lunch or dinner or both, but precise opening times and days are given only if they differ markedly from the pattern outlined here.

In winter months in country areas, café and restaurant hours will be cut back, while some places may close completely from October to Easter.

Shops, Banks & Offices

Monday to Friday, banks generally operate 9.30am to 5pm; post offices 9am to 6pm; and most offices, businesses and shops 9am to 5pm (possibly 5.30am or 6pm in cities). On Saturday, shops and main post offices keep the same hours, and main bank branches open 9.30am to 1pm; Sunday shopping hours are around 10am to 4pm.

In smaller towns, shops tend to close at weekends and for lunch (normally 1pm to 2pm), and in country areas on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon too. In cities and large towns, there's usually 'late-night' shopping on Thursday – up to about 7pm or 8pm. London and large cities have 24-hour convenience stores. At the other end of the scale, in the Outer Hebrides some locals adhere strictly to the Scriptures, so on Sunday, most shops and pubs are closed, few ferries run and you might even find the public toilets are padlocked.

CHILDREN

Who'd have 'em? No, really, travel with children can be fun, and kids are a great excuse if you secretly yearn to visit railway museums or ride the scariest roller coaster in the country. Many national parks and resort towns organise activities for children, especially in the school holiday periods (see p959), and local tourist offices are another great source of information on kid-friendly attractions. To help you further we've also included sections such as 'London for Children', 'Manchester for Children' and so on in the big-city sections.

Some hotels welcome kids (with their parents) and provide cots, toys and babysitting services, while others prefer to maintain an adult atmosphere, so you need to check this in advance. Likewise restaurants: some will have crayons and highchairs, and not mind if the menu ends up on the floor; others firmly say 'no children after 6pm'. Pubs and bars ban under-18s, unless they're specifically 'family-friendly' places – and many are, especially those serving food.

On the sticky topic of dealing with nappies while travelling, most museums and historical attractions have very good baby-changing facilities (cue old joke: I swapped mine for a nice souvenir), as do smart department stores. Elsewhere, you find facilities in motorway service stations and city-centre toilets – although the latter can sometimes be a bit on the grimy side.

Breastfeeding in public remains mildly controversial, but if done modestly is usually considered OK. For more advice see www.babygoes2.com – packed with tips, advice and encouragement for parents on the move.

CLIMATE CHARTS

For a discussion on Britain's changeable weather, see p24. See the climate charts (opposite) for the figures:

CUSTOMS

The UK has a two-tier customs system – one for goods bought in another EU country where taxes and duties have already been paid, and the other for goods bought duty-free outside the EU. Following is a summary of the rules; for more details see www.hmce.gov.uk or under Customs Allowances at www.visitbritain.com.

Duty Free

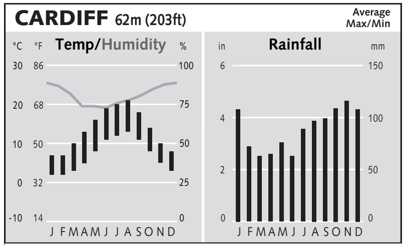
If you bring duty-free goods from *outside* the EU, the limits include 200 cigarettes, 2L of still wine, plus 1L of spirits or another 2L of wine, 60cc of perfume, and other duty-free goods (including beer) to the value of £145.

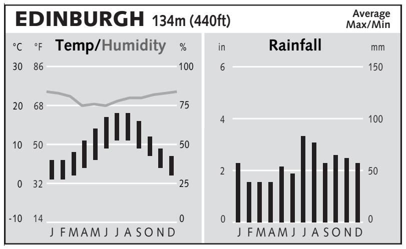
Tax & Duty Paid

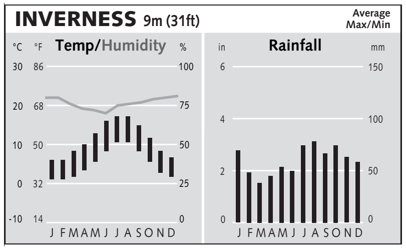
There is no limit to the goods you can bring from *within* the EU (if taxes have been paid), but customs officials use the following guidelines to distinguish personal use from commercial imports: 3000 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 10L of spirits, 20L of fortified wine, 90L of wine and 110L of beer – still enough to have one hell of a party.

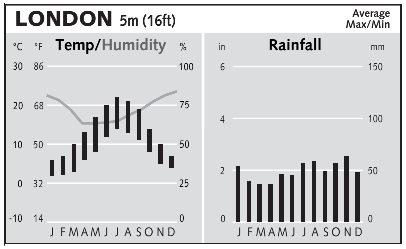
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

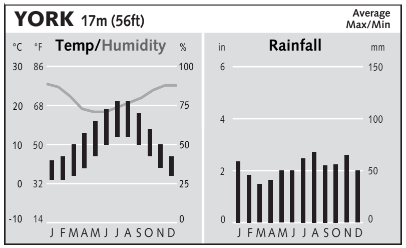
Britain is a remarkably safe country, considering the wealth disparities you'll see in many areas, but crime is certainly not unknown in London and other cities, so you should take care – especially at night. When travelling by tube, tram or urban train service, choose a carriage containing lots of people. It's also best to avoid some deserted suburban tube stations at night; a bus or taxi can be a safer choice.











As well as licensed taxis and minicabs (see p972 for the difference), unlicensed minicabs – essentially a bloke with a car earning money on the side – operate in large cities, but these are worth avoiding unless you know what you're doing. Annoyances include driving round in circles, then charging an enormous fare. Dangers include driving to a remote location then robbery or rape. To avoid this, use a metered taxi or phone a reputable minicab company and get an up-front quote for the ride. London and other big cities have websites and central phone lines to help you find a licensed cab; details are in the relevant chapters of this book.

On the main streets of big cities, mugging or bag-snatching is rare but money and important documents are best kept out of sight and out of reach rather than in a handbag or shoulder bag. Pickpockets operate in crowded public places such as tube stations or busy pubs and bars (bags and jackets hanging on chair-backs are popular targets), so make sure your stuff is safe here too.

In large hotels, don't leave valuables lying around the room; put them in your bag or use the safe if there is one. There's no harm doing the same at city B&Bs too, although in rural areas there's far less risk. In hostels with shared dorms, especially in the independent/backpacker hostels in cities and large towns, you should keep your stuff packed away and carry valuables with you. Many hostels provide lockers, but you need your own padlock.

If you're driving, remove luggage from the car when parking overnight in cities and towns. The same applies even in some apparently safe rural locations. While you're out

BEWARE TINY BITES

Between June and August, especially in northern England, and most notoriously in Scotland, millions of tiny biting insects called midges take to the air on cool windless evenings. They are not a danger, but their bites get very annoying if you're camping or enjoying outdoor activities. If you're staying in hostels or B&Bs they're no problem, but the gardens of country pubs can be a bit 'midgey' around sunset. Ways to counter the attack include wearing light-coloured clothing and using midge repellents (available in pharmacies and outdoor stores – brands without DDT include Mozi-guard and Swamp Gel). Or going inside.

walking in the countryside, someone may well be walking off with your belongings. Where possible, look for secure parking areas near tourist offices.

DISCOUNT CARDS

There's no specific discount card available for visitors to Britain, although travel cards (see p969) are discounted for younger and older people. Membership of the YHA and SYHA (see p951) can get you discounts in bookshops and outdoor-gear shops, and on some public transport.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

British Embassies

Below is a selection of Britain's diplomatic missions (embassies, consulates and high commissions) overseas; for a complete list, see the website of the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk), which also lists foreign embassies in the UK.

Australia (☎ 02-6270 6666; www.britaus.net; Commonwealth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-237 1530; 80 Elgin St, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5K7)

France (☎ 01 44 51 31 00; www.amb-grandebretagne.fr; 35 rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, 75383 Paris Cedex 8)

Germany (☎ 030-204 570; www.britischebotschaft.de; Wilhelmstrasse 70, 10117 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-205 3700; www.britishembassy.ie; 29 Merrion Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Japan (☎ 03-5211 1100; www.uknow.or.jp; 1 Ichiban-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8381)

Netherlands (☎ 070-427 0427; www.britain.nl; Lange Voorhout 10, 2514 ED The Hague)

New Zealand (☎ 04-924 2888; www.britain.org.nz; 44 Hill St, Wellington 1)

USA (☎ 202-588 6500; www.britainusa.com; 3100 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies in Britain

A selection of foreign diplomatic missions in London is given below. This will be of use to tourists from overseas if, for example, you've lost your passport. But remember that these embassies won't be much help if you're in trouble for committing a crime locally; even as a foreigner, you are bound by the laws of Britain.

Australia (Map pp122-3; ☎ 020-7379 4334; www.australia.org.uk; Strand, WC2B 4LA)

Canada (Map pp122-3; ☎ 020-7258 6600; www.canada.org.uk; 1 Grosvenor Sq, W1X 0AB)

China (☎ 020-7299 4049; www.chinese-embassy.org.uk; 49-51 Portland Pl, W1B 4JL)

France (☎ 020-7073 1000; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 58 Knightsbridge, SW1 7JT)

Germany (Map pp122-3; ☎ 020-7824 1300; www.german-embassy.org.uk; 23 Belgrave Sq, SW1X 8PX)

Ireland (Map pp122-3; ☎ 020-7235 2171; 17 Grosvenor Pl, SW1X 7HR)

Japan (☎ 020-7465 6500; www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp; 101 Piccadilly, W1J 7JT)

Netherlands (Map pp120-1; ☎ 020-7590 3200; www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk; 38 Hyde Park Gate, SW7 5DP)

New Zealand (Map pp130-1; ☎ 020-7930 8422; www.nzembassy.com/uk; 80 Haymarket, SW1Y 4TQ)

Poland (☎ 0870 774 2700; polishembassy.org.uk; 47 Portland Pl, W1B 1HQ)

USA (Map pp122-3; ☎ 020-7499 9000; www.usembassy.org.uk; 24 Grosvenor Sq, W1A 1AE)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Countless festivals and events are held around the country all year. Below is a selection of biggies that are worth tying in with your travels, and some of the smaller (and, frankly, more bizarre) events that are also worth catching. In addition, many towns have annual fairs or fêtes; many of these are listed in the regional chapters. Events are listed roughly chronologically, and where appropriate specific dates are given.

January

New Year Celebrations (1 January; city centres nationwide) Get drunk and kiss strangers as the bells chime midnight. The biggest crowds are in London's Trafalgar Sq.

Up Helly Aa (last Tuesday of January, Lerwick, Shetland Islands) The islanders honour their Nordic heritage by dressing up as Vikings and burning a longship.

February

Jorvik Viking Festival (mid-February; York) Horned helmets galore, plus mock invaders and Viking longship races. See p533.

Shrovetide Football (Shrove Tuesday; Ashbourne, Derbyshire) It's football, Jim, but not as we know it: day-long match, 3-mile pitch, hundreds of players, very few rules.

March

Crufts Dog Show (early/mid-March; Birmingham) Highlight of the canine year. Top dogs abound.

University Boat Race (late March/early April; London) Traditional rowing contest on the River Thames, between Oxford and Cambridge University teams.

April

Grand National (first Saturday in April; Aintree, Liverpool) The most famous horse race of them all, with notoriously high jumps.

Beltane (30 April; Edinburgh) Wild, weird and whacky fire and fertility festival, with dancing crowds, tribal drumming, body paint and lashings of sexual innuendo.

Cheltenham Jazz Festival (late April/early May; Cheltenham) One of the largest jazz gatherings in the country; big names, up-and-comings, concerts and funky club-dance evenings.

May

Obby Oss celebrations (1 May; Padstow, Devon) Ancient fertility festival, now an excuse for dressing up, pinching behinds and general good times.

FA Cup Final (early May; Wembley Stadium, London) Gripping end to venerable football tournament.

Brighton Festival (Brighton) Lively and innovative three-week arts feast. See p236.

Chelsea Flower Show (late May; London) Blooming marvellous.

Cheese Rolling (late May; Gloucestershire) Simple concept, centuries old: a big lump of cheese is rolled down a very steep hill, chased by hundreds of locals. The winner keeps the cheese. Losers may have broken legs.

Bath International Music Festival (mid-May to early June; Bath) Top-class classical music and opera, plus jazz and world music, with art-full Fringe attached. See p260.

Glyndebourne (end May to August; Lewes, Sussex) World-class opera in country-house gardens.

June

Beating Retreat (early June; London) Military bands march down Whitehall.

Derby Week (early June; Epsom, Surrey) Horse racing and people-watching.

Aldeburgh Festival (Aldeburgh, Suffolk) Classical music at the spiritual home of Benjamin Britten – Britain's best 20th-century composer.

Cotswold Olimpicks (early June; Chipping Camden) Since 1612 the locals have competed in events such as shin-kicking, sack-racing and climbing the slippery pole.

Trooping the Colour (mid-June; London) Whitehall again; bearskins and pageantry for the Queen's birthday parade.

Royal Ascot (mid-June; Ascot, Berkshire) More horse racing, more people-watching, plus outrageous hats. See p66.

Mela (mid-June; Bradford, Yorkshire) Multicultural festival with South Asian focus – music, dance food and more. One of the largest events of its kind in Britain.

Isle of Wight Festival (mid-June; Isle of Wight) Successful revival of the 1960s' rip-roaring hippy happening. See p225.

Wimbledon – Lawn Tennis Championships (late June; London) Two weeks of rapid-fire returns.

Royal Highland Show (Edinburgh) Scotland's national display piece with big-horned cattle, cabers, bagpipes, kilts – the lot.

Glastonbury Festival (late June; Pilton, Somerset) Huge open-air musical happening, with hippy roots. See p269.

Royal Regatta (late June/early July; Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire) Premier rowing and social event. No hippies here. See p355.

Pride (June/July; London) Formerly Mardi Gras and Pride in the Park, and occasionally EuroPride – Britain's major gay and lesbian festival.

July

Hampton Court Palace International Flower Show (early July; London) Does exactly what it says on the tin.

Buxton Festival (Buxton, Derbyshire) Relaxed and eclectic mix of opera, music and literature. See p448.

Royal Welsh Show (Builth Wells) National agricultural and cultural gathering.

T in the Park (early July; Balado) Open-air pop, rock and dance music. Scotland's answer to Glastonbury. See p796.

World Mountain Bike Bog Snorkelling Championships (early July, Llanwrtyd Wells) The name says it all. Cowes it ain't.

Sesiwn Fawr (Dolgellau) Three-day rock, folk and beer bash in Mid Wales. Fast-growing and free.

International Eisteddfod (mid-July; Llangollen) Lively mix of cultures from Wales and far beyond. See p717.

Cowes Week (late July; Isle of Wight) World-class yachting spectacular and high point of society calendar.

International Flying Display (late July; Farnborough, Surrey) World's largest aeroplane show.

Cambridge Folk Festival (late July; Cambridge) A long-standing favourite, with artists from the realms of roots, world, blues, acoustic, American hillbilly and 1960s pop – as well as top folk names.

Womad (late July; Reading, Berkshire) Global gathering of frontier-crossing world and roots music; laid back and family-friendly.

York Early Music Festival (late July; York) Travel back in time, with medieval choirs and concerts.

Truck (late July; Abingdon, Oxfordshire) A low-key, off-beat, anticorporate music festival – and jolly good fun indeed.

Eden Sessions (July/August; Eden Project, Cornwall) The famous biomes are transformed into the county's most spectacular live music venue.

August

Royal National Eisteddfod (early August; alternates between south and north Wales) The ancient bardic tradition continues; a festival of Welsh language, music and literature at its most powerful.

Military Tattoo (Edinburgh) Three weeks of pageantry and soldierly displays.

Edinburgh International Festival (Edinburgh) World-class arts gathering, overshadowed only by its own Fringe.

Three Choirs Festival (early August) Britain's premier, and the world's oldest, choral festival, held once every three years at the cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford or Worcester.

Sidmouth Folk Festival (early August; Sidmouth, Devon) A week of traditional music, workshops, concerts, ceilidhs and barn dances.

V Festival (mid-August; Staffordshire & Chelmsford, Essex) More rock and pop, if you just can't get enough.

Green Man Festival (mid-August; Crickhowel) Old-school gathering of camp fires and late-night guitar strumming, featuring the best of the UK modern folk scene plus international acts from the alternative world.

Whitby Folk Week (mid-/late August; Whitby, Yorkshire) More traditional music and dance. Grab your partner, or sit and listen to the band.

Notting Hill Carnival (late August; London) Spectacular multicultural feast, Caribbean style.

Reading Festival (late August; Reading, Berkshire) Three-day rock, pop and dance extravaganza. A true original but now with a major corporate feel.

Leeds Festival (late August; Leeds, Yorkshire) Dubbed the 'Reading of the North', and pretty much the same type of thing.

World Bog Snorkelling Championships (late August; Llanwrtyd Wells) Following July's filthy cycling event, now it's the swimmers turn to snorkel through the mire. Crazy, but the crowds love it.

The Big Chill (late August; Herefordshire) Recover from summer's excesses; an eclectic and relaxed mix of live music, club events, DJs, multimedia and visual art.

September

Braemar Gathering (first Saturday in September; Braemar, Deeside) With more than 20,000 people, including the royals, 'gathering' is an understatement for this famous Highland knees-up.

October

Horse of the Year Show (early October; Birmingham) Top show-jumping event. No long faces here.

November

Guy Fawkes Day (5 November) Bonfires and fireworks around the country.

December

New Year Celebrations (31 December) That's another year gone! Get ready for midnight – see January.

FOOD

For a flavour of Britain's cuisine, see the Food & Drink chapter (p101). For a real taste, visit the restaurants we recommend throughout this book. Most eating sections are divided into three price bands: budget (under £10), midrange (£10 to £20) and top end (over £20).These costs are for meals only; drinks will be extra. In London 'budget' is under £15, midrange is £15 to £40 and top end over £40. For more guidance, see p24.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Britain is a generally tolerant place for gays and lesbians. London, Glasgow, Manchester, Cardiff and Brighton have flourishing gay scenes, and in other sizable cities (even some small towns) you'll find communities not entirely in the closet. That said, you'll still find pockets of homophobic hostility in some areas, and you only need read the *Daily Mail* to realise the limits of tolerance.

For info, listings and contacts, see monthly magazines (and websites) *Gay Times* (www.gaytimes.co.uk) and *Diva* (www.divamag.co.uk), or the twice-monthly newspaper *Pink Paper* (www.pinkpaper.com). In the capital, a useful source of information is the **London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard** (☎ 020-7837 7324; www.llgs.org.uk; 🕑 24hr); there are similar services in cities and regions across the country. See also the boxed texts of specific gay and lesbian information in the sections on major cities throughout this book.

HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS

For many visitors, a highlight of a journey through Britain is visiting the numerous castles and other historic sites that pepper the country. Membership of Britain's heritage organisations gives you free entry to properties, reciprocal arrangements with similar bodies, maps, information handbooks and so on.

The main organisations are: National Trust (NT), and its partner organisation National Trust for Scotland (NTS); English Heritage (EH) and its equivalent organisations Historic Scotland (HS) and Cadw. You can join at the first site you visit. If you are a member of a similar organisation in your own country, this may get you free or discounted entry at sites in Britain. We have included the relevant initials (NT, EH etc) in the information after every property listed in this book.

Cadw (☎ 0800 074 3121; www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) This is the Welsh historic monuments agency. (The name means 'to keep' or 'to preserve'.) Membership costs adults £32 per year, 16 to 20 years £18 and children £14. Family membership costs £55, or £37 for a single-parent family. Cadw members are also eligible for half-price admission to EH and HS sites.

English Heritage (☎ 0870 333 1181; www.english-heritage.org.uk) This state-funded organisation is responsible for the upkeep of numerous historic sites in England. Some are free, while others cost £1.50 to £6. Annual membership costs £38/65 per adult/couple (£26/42 for seniors). Alternatively, an Overseas Visitors Pass allows free entry to most major EH sites for seven/14 days for £18/22 per person (with cheaper rates for couples and families), and half-price for HS and Cadw sites.

Historic Scotland (☎ 0131-668 8600; www.historic-scotland.gov.uk) This organisation manages more than 330 historic sites, and goes to great lengths to make things engaging and interesting for kids and adults, as well as accessible for less able visitors. A year's membership costs £36 for adults (£46 if you join from overseas), giving free admission to HS sites and half-price admission to EH and Cadw properties. 'Explorer' passes cost £18 for three days in five, £25 for seven days in 14, or £30 for 10 days in 30. Students and seniors get 25% discount on passes.

National Trust (☎ 0870 458 4000; www.nationaltrust.org.uk) This venerable body protects hundreds of historic buildings (normally around £5 to enter) plus vast tracts of land with scenic importance in England and Wales. Membership costs £40 per year (£18 for under-26s, and £55 to £73 for families), reduced by about 25% if you pay by direct debit. Alternatively, a NT touring pass gives free entry to NT and NTS properties for seven or 14 days (£17/22 per person); families and couples get cheaper rates.

National Trust for Scotland (☎ 0131-243 9300; www.nts.org.uk) The NT's sister organisation north of the border cares for more than 100 properties and around 290 sq miles of countryside. A year's membership costs £37 (£15/27/60 for under 25s/seniors/family),

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

In Britain, most businesses and banks close on public holidays (hence the quaint term 'Bank Holiday'). In Scotland, Bank Holidays are just for the banks, and many businesses stay open. Instead, Scottish towns normally have a spring and autumn holiday, but the dates vary from town to town.

Holidays for the whole of Britain (unless specified) are as follows:

New Year's Day	1 January
Good Friday	March/April
Easter Monday	(Except Scotland) March/April
May Day	First Monday in May
Spring Bank Holiday	Last Monday in May
Summer Bank Holiday	(Scotland) First Monday in August
Summer Bank Holiday	(England & Wales) Last Monday in August
Christmas Day	25 December
Boxing Day	26 December

In Scotland, 2 January is also a holiday – so everyone can recover from Hogmanay.

Across Britain, if a public holiday falls on a weekend, the nearest Monday is usually taken instead. Some small museums and places of interest close on public holidays, but larger attractions specifically gear up, and this is their busiest time. Generally speaking, if a place closes on Sunday, it'll probably be shut on Bank Holidays as well.

Virtually everything – shops, banks, offices, attractions – is closed on Christmas Day, although pubs are open at lunchtime. There's usually no public transport on Christmas Day, and a very restricted service on Boxing Day.

School Holidays

The main school holidays are generally as follows:

Easter Holiday	The week before and week after Easter.
Summer Holiday	Third week of July to first week of September.
Christmas Holiday	Mid-December to first week of January.

There are three week-long 'half-term' school holidays – usually late February or early March, late May and late October. At school-holiday times, especially in the summer, roads and resorts get busy, and prices go up.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is highly recommended for all overseas visitors to Britain; see p975. For car insurance, see p970.

INTERNET ACCESS

Places with internet access are reasonably common in Britain, but you won't find them on every corner. Internet cafés in bigger cities charge around £1 per hour; out in the sticks you can pay up to £5 per hour. Public libraries often have free access, but only for 30-minute slots.

If you plan to use your laptop to get online, your connection cable may not fit in British sockets, although adaptors are easy to buy at electrical stores in airports or city centres.

An increasing number of hotels, hostels and coffee shops (even some trains) have wi-fi access, charging anything from nothing to £5 per hour. Throughout this book, we use the 💻 icon to show if a place has PCs for public use, and the word 'wi-fi' if it has…you guessed it…wi-fi.

LEGAL MATTERS

Driving Crimes & Transport Fines

Drink-driving is a serious offence. For more information, and details about speed limits and parking rules, see p971.

On buses and trains (including the London Underground), people without a valid ticket for their journey may be fined – usually around £20 – on the spot.

Drugs

Illegal drugs are widely available, especially in clubs. All the usual dangers apply and there have been much-publicised deaths associated with ecstasy. The government reclassified cannabis in 2002: possession remains a criminal offence, but the punishment for carrying a small amount is usually a warning. Dealers face far stiffer penalties, as do people caught with any other 'recreational' drugs.

MAPS

For a map of the whole country, a road atlas is handy – especially if you're travelling by car. The main publishers are Ordnance Survey (OS) and Automobile Association (AA), with atlases in all sizes and scales. If you plan to use minor roads, you'll need a scale of about 1:200,000 (3 miles to 1in). Most road atlases cost £7 to £10 and are updated annually, which means old editions are sold off every January – look for bargains at motorway service stations.

For more detail, the OS *Landrangers* (1:50,000) is ideal for walking and cycling. OS *Explorer* maps (1:25,000) are even better for walking in lowland areas, but can sometimes be hard to read in complex mountain landscapes. Your best choice here is the excellent specialist series produced for ramblers, walkers, mountaineers and other outdoor types by **Harvey Maps** (www.harveymaps.co.uk), covering upland areas and national parks, plus routes for hikers and bikers.

LEGAL AGE

The age of consent in Britain is 16 (gay and straight). You can also get married at 16 (with permission from parents), but you'll have to wait two years for the toast – you must be over 18 to buy alcohol. Over-16s may buy cigarettes, so it's legal to have a celebratory smoke instead.

You usually have to be 18 to enter a pub or bar, although the rules are different if you have a meal. Some bars and clubs are over-21 only, so you won't see many high-chairs – although there may be a lot of school uniforms around.

MONEY

The currency of Britain is the pound sterling. Paper money comes in £5, £10, £20 and £50 denominations (and £1 in Scotland), although £50s can be difficult to change because fakes circulate. Other currencies are not accepted if you're buying goods and services, except for a few places in southern England which take euros.

In England and Wales, notes are issued by the Bank of England, and in Scotland by Clydesdale Bank, Bank of Scotland and Royal Bank of Scotland. All are legal tender on both sides of the border, but if you have any problems, ask a bank to swap them.

A guide to exchange rates is given on the inside front cover, and for some pointers on costs, see p24.

ATMs

Debit or credit cards are perfect companions – the best invention for travellers since the backpack. You can use them in most shops, and withdraw cash from ATMs (often called 'cash machines') – which are easy to find in cities and even small towns. But ATMs aren't fail-safe, and it's a major headache if your only card gets swallowed, so take a back-up.

Credit & Debit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and Amex cards are widely accepted in Britain, and are good for larger hotels, flights, long-distance travel, car hire etc. Smaller businesses, such as pubs or B&Bs, often only take cash or cheque.

Since early 2006, nearly all credit and debit cards use the 'chip & pin' system; instead of signing, you enter a PIN (personal identification number). If you're from overseas, and your card isn't 'chip & pin' enabled, you sign in the usual way.

Moneychangers

Finding a place to change your money (cash or travellers cheques) into pounds is never a problem in cities, where banks and bureaus compete for business. Be careful using bureaus, however; some offer poor rates or levy outrageous commissions. You can also change money at some post offices – very handy in country areas, and rates are usually good.

Tipping & Bargaining

In restaurants you're expected to leave around 10% tip, but at smarter restaurants in larger cities waiters can get a bit sniffy if the tip isn't nearer 12% or even 15%. Either way, it's important to remember that you're not obliged to tip if the service or food was unsatisfactory (even if it's been added to your bill as a 'service charge'). At smarter cafés and teashops with table service around 10% is fine. If you're paying with a credit or debit card, and you want to add the tip to the bill, it's worth asking the waiting staff if they'll actually receive it. Some prefer to receive tips in cash.

Taxi drivers also expect tips (about 10%, or rounded up to the nearest pound), especially in London. It's less usual to tip minicab drivers. Toilet attendants (if you see them loitering) may get tipped around 50p.

In pubs, when you order and pay for drinks or food at the bar, tips are not expected. If you order food at the table and your meal is brought to you, then a tip may be appropriate – if the food and service have been good, of course. For more advice see p108.

Bargaining is rare, although occasionally encountered at markets. It's fine to ask if there are student discounts on items such as theatre tickets, books or outdoor equipment.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques (TCs) offer protection from theft, so are safer than wads of cash, but are rarely used in Britain these days, as credit/debit cards and ATMs become the method of choice for most people. If you do prefer TCs, note that they are rarely accepted for purchases (except at large hotels), so for cash you'll still need to go to a bank or bureau.

POST

Although queues in main post offices can be long, the Royal Mail delivers a good service. Within the UK, 1st-class letters cost 32p and usually take one day; 2nd-class (23p) up to three days. Letters by airmail cost 44p to EU European countries and 72p to the rest of the world (up to 20g). Postcards are 50p. For details on all prices, see www.postoffice.co.uk.

TELEPHONE

Britain's iconic red phone boxes can still be seen in city streets and especially in conservation areas, although many have been replaced by soulless glass cubicles. Either way, public phones accept coins (minimum charge 20p), and usually credit/debit cards, although with the advent of mobile phones (cell phones), many phone booths have been removed and not replaced at all.

Area codes in Britain do not have a standard format, and vary in length, which can be confusing for foreigners (and many Brits). For example ☎ 020 for London, ☎ 029 for Cardiff, ☎ 0161 for Manchester, ☎ 0113 for Leeds, ☎ 01629 for Matlock and ☎ 015394 for Ambleside, followed as usual by the individual number. Throughout this book, most area codes are listed at the start of each city/area section. For clarity, where area codes and individual numbers are listed together, they're separated by a hyphen.

As well as the geographical area codes, other 'codes' include: ☎ 0500 or ☎ 0800 for free calls, and ☎ 0845 for calls at local rate, wherever you're dialling from within the UK. Numbers starting with ☎ 087 are charged at national-call rate, while numbers starting with ☎ 089 or ☎ 09 are premium rate, and should be specified by the company using the number (ie in their advertising literature), so you know the cost before you call. (These codes and numbers are not separated by hyphen in this book, as you always have to dial the whole number.) Note that many numbers starting with ☎ 08 or ☎ 09 do not work if you're calling from outside the UK, or if they do you'll be charged for a full international call – and then some.

Codes for mobile phones usually start with ☎ 07; calls are more expensive than calling a land line.

International Calls

To call outside the UK dial ☎ 00, then the country code (☎ 1 for USA, ☎ 61 for Australia etc), the area code (you usually drop the initial zero) and the number.

Direct-dialled calls to most overseas countries can be made from most public telephones, and it's usually cheaper between 8pm and 8am Monday to Friday and at weekends. You can usually save money by buying a phonecard (usually denominated £5, £10 or £20) with a PIN that you use from any phone by dialling an access number (you don't insert it into the machine). There are dozens of cards, usually available from city newsagents – with rates of the various companies often vividly displayed.

To make reverse-charge (collect) calls, dial ☎ 155 for the international operator. It's an expensive option, but what the hell – the other person is paying!

To call Britain from abroad, dial your country's international access code, then ☎ 44 (the UK's country code), then the area code (dropping the first 0) and the phone number.

Most internet cafés now have Skype or some other sort of internet-telephone system, so you can make international calls for the price of your time online.

Local & National calls

Local calls (within 35 miles) are cheaper than national calls. All calls are cheaper from 6pm to 8am Monday to Friday, and from midnight Friday to midnight Sunday. From private phones, rates vary between telecom providers. From BT public phones the weekday rate is about 5p per minute; evenings and weekends it's about 1p per minute.

For the operator, call ☎ 100. For directory inquiries, a host of agencies compete for your business and charge from 10p to 40p; numbers include ☎ 118192, ☎ 118118, ☎ 118247, ☎ 118500 and ☎ 118811.

Mobile Phones

Around 50 million people in the UK have mobile phones, and thus the ability to tell their loved ones they're on the train. The terse medium of SMS is a national passion, with a billion text messages sent monthly.

Phones in the UK use GSM 900/1800, which is compatible with Europe and Australia but not with North America or Japan (although phones that work globally are increasingly common).Even if your phone works in the UK, because it's registered overseas a call to someone just up the road will be routed internationally and charged accordingly. An option is to buy a local SIM card (around £10), which includes a UK number, and use that in your own handset (as long as your phone isn't locked by your home network).

A second option is to buy a pay-as-you-go phone (from around £50); to stay in credit, you buy 'top-up' cards at newsagents. A third option is to rent a phone – see p133.

TIME

Wherever you are in the world, time is measured in relation to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT, or Universal Time Coordinated – UTC – as it's more accurately called), so a highlight for many visitors to London is a trip to Greenwich and its famous line dividing the western and eastern hemispheres.

To give you an idea, if it is noon in London, it is 4am on the same day in San Francisco, 7am in New York and 10pm in Sydney. British summer time (BST) is Britain's daylight saving; one hour ahead of GMT from late March to late October.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Before leaving home, check the comprehensive and wide-ranging website of **VisitBritain** (www.visitbritain.com) or the more specific sites www.enjoyengland.com, www.visitscotland.com and www.visitwales.com. Between them they cover all angles of national tourism, with links to numerous other sites. Details about local and regional websites and tourist organisations are also given at the start of each main chapter throughout this book.

Local Tourist Offices

All British cities and towns (and some villages) have a Tourist Information Centre (TIC). Some TICs are run by national parks. You'll also come across Visitor Welcome Centres, Visitor Information Centres or Visitor Information Points; for ease, we've used 'tourist office' throughout this book.

Whatever the name, these places usually have incredibly helpful staff, books and maps for sale, leaflets to give away and loads of advice on things to see or do. They can also assist with booking accommodation (sometimes free, sometimes for a small charge). Most tourist offices keep regular business hours; in quiet areas they close from October to March, while in popular areas they open daily year-round.

Look out too for Tourist Information Points – usually a rack of leaflets about local attractions set up in a post office or shop in a village not big enough to have its own full-on tourist office. And be aware that some Visitor Information Points are privately owned booking agencies – for local self-catering cottages or similar. You can often pick up leaflets here, but the staff rarely provide additional (or independent) tourism information.

For a list of all official tourist offices around Britain see www.visitmap.info/tic.

Tourist Offices Abroad

VisitBritain's main overseas offices are listed below. Those in other countries are listed on www.visitbritain.com. Offices with a physical address can deal with walk-in visitors; for the others it's phone or email only. As well as information, they can help with discount travel cards, often available only if you book before arrival in Britain.

Australia (☎ 02-9021 4400; www.visitbritain.com/au; 15 Blue St, North Sydney, NSW 2060)
Canada (☎ 1 888 847 4885; www.visitbritain.com/ca)
France (☎ 01 58 36 50 50; www.visitbritain.com/fr)
Germany (☎ 01801-468 642; www.visitbritain.com/de; Hackescher Markt 1, 10178 Berlin)
Ireland (☎ 01-670 8000; www.visitbritain.com/ie; 22-24 Newmount House, Lower Mount St, Dublin 2)
Japan (☎ 03-5562 2550; www.visitbritain.com/jp; 1F Akasaka Twin Tower, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-0052)
Netherlands (☎ 020-689 0002; www.visitbritain.com/nl)
New Zealand (☎ 0800 700741; www.visitbritain.com/nz)
USA (☎ 800 462 2748; www.visitbritain.com/us; 551 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10176)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

If you happen to use a wheelchair or crutches, or just find moving about a bit tricky, you'll find Britain a mixed bag. All new buildings have wheelchair access, and even hotels in grand old country houses often have modern lifts, ramps and other facilities added, although smaller B&Bs and guesthouses are often harder to adapt, so you'll have less choice here. In this book we've used an icon (♿) to indicate hotels, restaurants and so on that are 'wheelchair friendly'. For us that means the whole package. It's no good, for example, having a ramp to the door, but then tables so close together that even the able-bodied have trouble squeezing through, or toilets up a flight of steps with no lift.

In cities, old-style buses had conductors to lend a hand when getting on or off, but new buses have a driver only. The new buses do have low floors for easy access, although this 'disabled friendly' development seems to have absolved the rest of the travelling public from offering assistance. Many taxis take wheelchairs, or just have more room in the back, so that might be a better way to go.

For long-distance travel, coaches present problems if you can't walk, but staff will help where possible (see the 'Why choose us?' section of www.nationalexpress.com). On trains there's usually more room and better facilities, and often station staff around; just have a word and they'll be happy to help. If possible, make advance arrangements, and you'll find a staff-member expecting you and ready to help.

Useful organisations and websites include the following:

All Go Here (www.allgohere.com) Comprehensive info on hotels and travel.
Disability UK (www.disabilityuk.com) Excellent resource, includes details of shopmobility schemes.
Good Access Guide (www.goodaccessguide.co.uk) The name says it all.
Holiday Care Service (☎ 0845 124 9971; www.holidaycare.org.uk) Publisher of numerous booklets on UK travel.
Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (Radar; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk) Published titles include *Holidays in Britain and Ireland*.

VISAS

If you're a European Economic Area (EEA) national, you don't need a visa to visit Britain (you can also work here freely). Citizens of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA are given leave to enter Britain at their point of arrival for up to six months, but are prohibited from working. (If you intend to seek work, see p964.)

Visa and entry regulations are always subject to change, so it's vital to check with your local British embassy, high commission or consulate before leaving home. For more information, check www.ukvisas.gov.uk.

For more information about entering the country, see p965.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Britain is in transition when it comes to weights and measures, as it has been for the last 20 years – and probably will be for 20 more. Most people still use imperial units of inches, feet, yards and miles, although mountain heights on maps are given in metres only.

For weight, many people use pounds and ounces, even though since January 2000 goods in shops must be measured in kilograms. And nobody knows their weight in pounds (like Americans) or kilograms (like the rest of the world); Brits weigh themselves in stones, an archaic unit of 14 pounds.

TRACE THE ANCESTORS

If you're a visitor with ancestors who once lived in Britain, your trip could be a good chance to find out more about (or simply find) long-lost relatives. Here are a few guidelines to get you started.

The **Family Records Centre** (☎ 0845 603 7788; www.familyrecords.gov.uk; 1 Myddelton St, London EC1R 1UW), a helpful department of the Public Records Office (PRO), is familiar with the needs of ancestor-hunters and has publications (available by post) outlining the process. You'll need a passport as ID to see original records, although documents referring to individuals are closed for 100 years to safeguard confidentiality.

The **Association of Genealogists & Researchers in Archives** (www.agra.org.uk) lists professional researchers. For a fee they can search for ancestors or living relatives on your behalf.

When it comes to volume, things are even worse: most liquids are sold in litres or half-litres, except milk and beer, which come in pints. Garages sell petrol priced in pence per litre, but measure car performance in miles per gallon. Great, isn't it?

In this book we have reflected this wacky system of mixed measurements: heights are given in metres (m) and distances in miles. For conversion tables, see the inside front cover.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The occasional wolf whistle from a building site or groper on the London Underground aside, solo women will find Britain fairly enlightened. There's nothing to stop women going into pubs alone, for example – although you may feel conspicuous in a few places. Restaurants may assume you're waiting for a date unless you specify a table for one, but once you've clarified, it's no big deal.

The contraceptive pill is available free on prescription in Britain, as is the morning-after pill (also on sale at chemists). Most big towns have a Well Woman Clinic that can advise on general health issues; find its address in the local phone book.

Safety is not a major issue, although commonsense caution should be observed in big cities, especially at night. Hitching is always unwise. See p954 for advice on travel by minicab. Should the worst happen, most cities and towns have a Rape Crisis centre, where information or counselling is free and confidential; see www.rapecrisis.org.uk for details.

WORK

Nationals of most European countries don't need a permit to work in Britain, but everyone else does. If you're a non-European, and this is the main purpose of your visit, you must be sponsored by a British company.

Exceptions include Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born parent; a Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode allows you to live and work in Britain free of immigration control. If one of your grandparents was born in the UK you may be eligible for an Ancestry Employment Certificate allowing full-time work for up to four years.

Commonwealth citizens under 31 without UK ancestry are allowed to take temporary work during their holiday, but need a Working Holiday Entry Certificate – which must be obtained in advance and is valid for four years. You're not allowed to engage in business, pursue a career (evidently serving in bars doesn't count as a 'career') or work as a professional athlete or entertainer. Au pair placements are generally permitted.

Useful websites include: www.workingintheuk.gov.uk (the official government site); www.bunac.org (advice on six-month work permits for students from the USA); and www.workingholidayguru.com (aimed mainly at Australians coming to Europe).

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

London is an international transport hub, so you can easily fly to Britain from just about anywhere in the world. In recent years, the massive growth of budget ('no-frills') airlines has increased the number of routes – and reduced fares – between Britain and destinations in Ireland or mainland Europe.

Your other main option for travel between Britain and mainland Europe is ferry, either port-to-port or combined with a long-distance bus trip – although journeys can be long and savings not huge compared with budget airfares. International trains are much more comfortable, and the Channel Tunnel allows direct rail services between Britain, France and Belgium.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Getting from England to Scotland and Wales is easy. The bus and train systems are fully integrated and in most cases you won't even know you've crossed the border. Passports are not required – although some Scots and Welsh may think they should be!

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

British immigration authorities are always polite and professional, but if they suspect you're entering Britain for more than a holiday they can be tough, and you may need to prove that you have funds to support yourself, details of any hotels or local tours booked, or personal letters from people you'll be visiting. Having a return ticket helps too.

Passport

All visitors to Britain need a valid passport. For details of who needs a visa see p963.

AIR

Airports

London's Heathrow and Gatwick are the two main airports for international flights. Also near London, Luton and Stansted airports deal largely with charter and budget European flights, while London City Airport specialises in business flights. For more details on getting between the London airports and central London see p179.

Some 15 miles west of central London, **Heathrow** (LHR; ☎ 0870 000 0123; www.heathrowairport.com) is the world's busiest airport, often chaotic and crowded, with four terminals (plus a fifth under construction and a sixth mooted). If you're leaving Britain via Heathrow, make certain you know which terminal your flight is departing from, and allow plenty of time to stand in queues for security checks or get lost in the labyrinth of shops and soulless eateries.

Smaller than Heathrow, but increasingly busy, **Gatwick** (LGW; ☎ 0870 000 2468; www.gatwickairport.com) is 30 miles south of central London, and served by scheduled, charter and budget airlines.

DEPARTURE TAX

Flights within the UK and to EU destinations attract a £10 departure tax. For other international flights from the UK you pay £20. This is usually included in the ticket price.

London's third-busiest airport, **Stansted** (STN; ☎ 0870 000 0303; www.stanstedairport.com) is 35 miles northeast of central London, and used mainly by charter and budget airlines – making it one of Europe's fastest-growing airports.

Some 35 miles north of central London, **Luton** (LTN; ☎ 01582-405100; www.london-luton.co.uk) is the main base of low-cost airline EasyJet, and also serves charter flights.

About 6 miles east of central London in Docklands, **London City Airport** (LCY; ☎ 020-7646 0088; www.londoncityairport.com), has flights to/from mainland Europe, Ireland and other UK airports.

Some planes on transatlantic and European routes zip direct to major regional airports such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester, while smaller regional airports such as Southampton, Aberdeen, Bristol, Newcastle, Nottingham East Midlands, Southampton and the new Robin Hood International are served by scheduled and charter flights to/from Continental Europe and Ireland.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor transport generates CO_2 (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Airlines

Most of the world's major airlines have services to/from Britain, including the following (with their UK contact and reservation numbers):

Aer Lingus (EI; ☎ 0845 084 4444; www.aerlingus.com)
Air Canada (AC; ☎ 0871 220 1111; www.aircanada.ca)
Air France (AF; ☎ 0845 359 1000; www.airfrance.com)
Air New Zealand (NZ; ☎ 0800 028 4149; www.airnewzealand.co.nz)
Alitalia (AZ; ☎ 0870 544 8259; www.alitalia.com)
American Airlines (AA; ☎ 08457 789 789; www.americanairlines.com)
bmi-British Midland (BD; ☎ 0870 607 0555; www.flybmi.com)
British Airways (BA; ☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com)
Cathay Pacific (CX; ☎ 020 8834 8888; www.cathaypacific.com)
Continental Airlines (CO; ☎ 0845 607 6760; www.continental.com)
Delta Air Lines (DL; ☎ 0800 414767; www.delta.com)
Emirates (EK; ☎ 0870 243 2222; www.emirates.com)
Iberia (IB; ☎ 0845 850 9000; www.iberia.com)
KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (KL; ☎ 08705 074 074; www.klm.com)
Lufthansa Airlines (LH; ☎ 08708 377 747; www.lufthansa.com)
Qantas Airways (QF; ☎ 08457 747 767; www.qantas.com.au)
Scandinavian Airlines (SK; ☎ 0870 607 2772; www.scandinavian.net)
Singapore Airlines (SQ; ☎ 0870 608 8886; www.singaporeair.com)
South African Airways (SA; ☎ 0870 747 1111; www.flysaa.com)
United Airlines (UA; ☎ 08458 444 777; www.united.com)
Virgin Atlantic (VS; ☎ 0870 380 2007; www.virgin-atlantic.com)

Budget airlines flying between Britain and other European countries can offer real bargains. Fares vary according to demand, and are best bought online. The only downside is that some no-frills airlines land at minor airports a considerable distance from the centre of the city they claim to serve. Main players serving British airports:

EasyJet (U2; ☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com)
Jet2 (LS; ☎ 0871 226 1737; www.jet2.com)
Ryanair (FR; ☎ 0871 246 0000; www.ryanair.com)
Virgin Express (TV; ☎ 0870 730 1134; www.virgin-express.com)

To save trawling several sites, services such as www.skyscanner.com and www.lowcostairlines.org have information on many scheduled airlines. For budget airlines try www.whichbudget.com.

Charter flights are another option. You can buy seat-only deals on the planes that carry tourists between, for example, Britain and numerous Mediterranean resorts. Contact high-street travel agencies, or specialist websites such as www.flightline.co.uk and www.cheapflights.co.uk.

Tickets

You can buy your airline ticket from a travel agency (in person, by phone or on the internet), or direct from the airline (the best deals are often available online only). Whichever method you choose, it always pays to shop around. Internet travel agencies such as www.travelocity.com and www.expedia.com work well if you're doing a straightforward trip, but for anything slightly complex there's no substitute for a real live travel agent who knows the system, the options, the special deals and so on.

The best place to start your search for agencies or airlines is the travel section of a weekend newspaper. Scan the advertisements, phone a few numbers, check a few websites, build up an idea of options, then take it from there. Remember, you usually get what you pay for: cheaper flights may leave at unsociable hours or include several stopovers. For quick and comfortable journeys, you have to fork out more cash.

Australia & New Zealand

To Britain from the southern hemisphere is a very popular route, with a wide range of fares from about A$1500 to A$3000 return. From New Zealand it's often best to go via Australia. Round-the-world (RTW) tickets can sometimes work out cheaper than a straightforward return. Major agencies include the following:

AUSTRALIA

Flight Centre (☎ 13 31 33; www.flightcentre.com.au)
STA Travel (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au)

NEW ZEALAND

Flight Centre (☎ 0800 243544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)
STA Travel (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz)

Canada & the USA

There is a continuous price war on the world's busiest transcontinental route. Return fares from the East Coast to London range from US$300 to US$600. From the West Coast, fares are about US$100 higher. Major agencies include the following:

CANADA

Flight Centre (☎ 1888-967 5355; www.flightcentre.ca)
Travel CUTS (☎ 866 246 9762; www.travelcuts.com)

USA

Flight Centre (☎ 1866-WORLD 51; www.flightcentre.us)
STA Travel (☎ 800 781 4040; www.statravel.com)

LAND

Bus

You can easily get between Britain and numerous cities in Ireland or mainland Europe via long-distance bus. The international bus network **Eurolines** (www.eurolines.com) connects a huge number of destinations; the website has links to bus operators in each country, and gives contact details of local offices. In Britain, you can book Eurolines tickets on the phone or at the website of **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com), and at many travel agencies.

Bus travel may be slower and less comfortable than going by train, but it's usually cheaper, especially if you're under 25 or over 60. Some sample single fares (and approximate journey times) are: London to/from Amsterdam €40 (12 hours); Barcelona €125 (24 hours); Dublin €30 (12 hours). Frequent special offers (called 'fun fares') can bring these prices way down, but it's still worth checking the budget airlines. You may pay a similar fare and knock a large chunk off the journey time.

Train

CHANNEL TUNNEL SERVICES

The Channel Tunnel makes direct train travel between Britain and Continental Europe a fast and enjoyable option. High-speed **Eurostar** (☎ 08705 186 186; www.eurostar.com) passenger services hurtle at least 10 times daily between London and Paris (three hours), and London and Brussels (2½ hours), via Ashford and Calais. A new high-speed rail link on the British side will be complete in 2007 which will slice another 30 minutes off the journey.

You can buy tickets from travel agencies, major train stations or direct from Eurostar. The normal single fare between London and Paris/Brussels is around £150, but advance deals can drop to around £70 return, or less. Seniors and under-25s get reductions. Bicycles must be in a bike bag.

If you've got a car, your other option is **Eurotunnel** (☎ 08705 353535; www.eurotunnel.com). You drive to the coast (Folkestone in England, Calais in France), drive onto a train, get carried through the tunnel, and drive off at the other end. The trains run about four times hourly from 6am to 10pm, then hourly. Loading and unloading is one hour; the journey takes 35 minutes. You can book in advance direct with Eurotunnel or pay on the spot (cash or credit card). The standard cost for a car (and passengers) is around £200 return, but cheaper promotional fares often bring the cost down closer to £100.

TRAIN & FERRY CONNECTIONS

As well as Eurostar, many 'normal' trains run between Britain and mainland Europe. You buy a direct ticket, but get off the train at the port, walk onto a ferry, then get another train on the other side. Routes include: Amsterdam to London (via Hook of Holland and Harwich) and Paris to London (via Calais and Dover). Standard single fares for these journeys are about £50, but cheaper deals are usually available.

Travelling between Ireland and Britain, the main train-ferry-train route is Dublin to London, via Dun Laoghaire and Holyhead. From southern Ireland, ferries travel between Rosslare and Fishguard or Pembroke, and there are train connections on either side.

SEA

The main ferry routes between Britain and Ireland include Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire. Between Britain and mainland Europe, ferry routes include Dover to Calais (France); Harwich to Hook of Holland (Netherlands); Hull to Zeebrugge (Belgium) and Rotterdam (Holland); Portsmouth to Santander or Bilbao (Spain); Newcastle to Bergen (Norway) or Gothenberg (Sweden); Rosyth, near Edinburgh, to Zeebrugge; and Lerwick to Bergen. There are many more.

Competition from Eurotunnel and budget airlines has forced ferry operators to offer constant discounted fares, with options varying massively (in budget airline style) according to demand. Go at a busy time and you pay a lot. Go in the middle of the night outside holiday time, and you should get a bargain. Booking early can also help reduce costs. As well as these variants, fares depend on the size of car and the number of passengers. If you're a foot passenger, or cycling, you've got more flexibility.

The best cross-channel deals are return fares – often much cheaper than two singles; and sometimes cheaper than *one* single! On longer ferry trips, the fare might include a cabin.

Main ferry operators (and their UK contact details):

Brittany Ferries (☎ 08703 665 333; www.brittany-ferries.com)
DFDS Seaways (☎ 08702 520 524; www.dfds.co.uk)
Hoverspeed (☎ 0870 240 8070; www.hoverspeed.co.uk)
Irish Ferries (☎ 08705 171717; www.irishferries.com)
P&O Ferries (☎ 08705 202020; www.poferries.com)
SpeedFerries (☎ 0870 220 0570; www.speedferries.com)
Stena Line (☎ 08705 707070; www.stenaline.com)
Transmanche (☎ 0800 917 1201; www.transmanche ferries.com)

Another option is www.ferrybooker.com – an online agency covering all sea-ferry routes, plus Eurotunnel.

GETTING AROUND

For getting around Britain by public transport, your main options are train and long-distance bus (called coach in Britain). Services between major towns and cities are generally good, although expensive compared with other European countries. Delays are frequent too, especially on the rail network, but these tend to afflict commuters rather than visitors: if your journey from London to Bath runs 30 minutes late, what's the problem? You're on holiday!

As long as you have time, using a mix of train, coach, local bus, the odd taxi, walking and occasionally hiring a bike, you can get almost anywhere without having to drive. You'll certainly see more of the countryside than you might slogging along grey motorways, and in the serene knowledge that you're doing less environmental damage. Having said that, in some rural areas the bus services can be patchy, so a car can often be handy for reaching out-of-the-way spots.

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) is a very useful information service covering bus, coach, taxi and train services nationwide (although some areas are better represented than others), with numerous links to help plan your journey. By phone, you get transferred automatically to an advisor in the region you're phoning *from;* for details on another part of the country you may have to be transferred to another assistant. Another good site is www.transportdirect.com.

AIR

Britain's domestic air companies include British Airways, bmi, bmibaby, EasyJet and Ryanair. If you're really pushed for time, flights on longer routes across Britain (eg Exeter or Southampton to Newcastle or Edinburgh) are handy, although you miss the glorious scenery in between. On some shorter routes (eg London to Newcastle, or Manchester to Newquay) trains can compare favourably with planes, once airport downtime is factored in. On costs, you might get a bargain air fare, but trains can be cheaper if you buy tickets in advance.

BICYCLE

Britain is a compact country, and getting around by bicycle is perfectly feasible – and a great way to really see the country – if you've got time to spare. For more ideas see p86.

BUS & COACH

If you're on a tight budget, long-distance buses are nearly always the cheapest way to get around, although they're also the slowest – sometimes by a considerable margin.

In Britain, long-distance express buses are called coaches, and in many towns there are separate bus and coach stations. Make sure you go to the right place!

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) is the main operator, with a wide network and frequent services between main centres. North of the border, services tie in with those of **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk), Scotland's leading coach company. Coach fares are very reasonable (eg London to York around £20, London to Edinburgh from £25, with special-offer 'fun fares' as low as £1).

Also offering fares from £1 is **Megabus** (www.megabus.com), operating a budget airline–style service between about 20 main destinations around the country. Go at a quiet time, book early and your ticket will be very cheap. Book last-minute, for a busy time and… You get the picture.

For information about short-distance and local bus services see p971.

Bus Passes & Discounts

National Express offers NX2 discount passes to full-time students and under-26s. They cost £10, and get you 30% off standard adult fares. Proof and a passport photo are required. People over 60, families and travellers with disabilities also get discounts.

For touring the country, National Express also offers Brit Xplorer passes, which allow unlimited travel for seven days (£79), 14 days (£139) and 28 days (£219). You don't need to book journeys in advance with this pass; if the coach has a spare seat, you can take it. This deal is only available to non-Brits though.

If you just want a pass for touring Scotland, Scottish Citylink has three main options: three days travel in five days for £35; five days in 10 for £59; eight in 16 for £79. These passes are available to everyone.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Travelling by private car or motorbike you can be independent and flexible, and reach remote places, although in cities you'll need superhuman skills to negotiate heaving traffic, plus deep pockets for parking charges. For solo budget travellers a downside of car travel is the expense, but if there are two of you (or more), car travel can work out cheaper than public transport.

Motorways and main A-roads are dual carriageways and will deliver you quickly from one end of the country to another. Lesser A-roads, B-roads and minor roads are much more scenic and fun, especially in northern England, much of Wales and Scotland, as you wind through the countryside from village to village; ideal for car or motorcycle touring. You can't travel fast, but you won't care.

Petrol and diesel cost around 95p per litre, although fuel prices rise as you get away from cities and large towns.

Hire

Compared with many countries (especially the USA), hire rates are expensive in Britain; you should expect to pay around £250 per week for a small car (unlimited mileage). Rates rise at busy times and drop at quiet times (especially at easyCar, where you also get better rates for advance reservations and special offers can drop to £3 per day). Some main players:

1car1 (☎ 0113-387 5866; www.1car1.com)
Avis (☎ 0870 010 0287; www.avis.co.uk)
Budget (☎ 08701 565656; www.budget.com)
easyCar (☎ 0906 333 3333; www.easycar.com)
Europcar (☎ 0870 607 5000; www.europcar.co.uk)
Hertz (☎ 0870 844 8844; www.hertz.co.uk)
National (☎ 0870 400 4502; www.nationalcar.com)
Sixt (☎ 08701 567567; www.e-sixt.co.uk)
Thrifty (☎ 01494-751600; www.thrifty.co.uk)

Many international websites have separate pages for customers in different countries, and the prices for a car in Britain on, say, the UK pages can be cheaper or more expensive than the same car on the USA or Australia pages. The moral is – you have to surf a lot of sites to find the best deals.

Your other option is to use an internet search engine to find small local car-hire companies in Britain who can undercut the big boys. Generally those in cities are cheaper than in rural areas. See under Getting Around in the main city sections for more details, or see a rental broker site such as **UK Car Hire** (www.uk-carhire.net).

Another option is to hire a motor home or camper van. It's more expensive than hiring a car but it does help you save on accommodation costs, and gives almost unlimited freedom. Sites to check include www.coolcampervans.com, www.wildhorizon.co.uk and www.justgo.uk.com.

Motoring Organisations

Large motoring organisations include the **Automobile Association** (☎ 0800 085 2721; www.theaa.com) and the **Royal Automobile Club** (☎ 0800 731 7090; www.rac.co.uk); annual membership starts at around £35, including 24-hour roadside breakdown assistance. A greener alternative is the **Environmental Transport Association** (☎ 0800 212 810; www.eta.co.uk); it provides all the usual services (breakdown assistance, roadside rescue, vehicle inspections etc) but *doesn't* campaign for more roads.

Parking

Britain is small, and people love their cars, so there's often not enough parking space to go round. Many cities have short-stay and long-stay car parks; the latter are cheaper though maybe less convenient. 'Park and Ride' systems allow you to park on the edge of the city then ride to the centre on regular buses provided for an all-in-one price.

Yellow lines (single or double) along the edge of the road indicate restrictions. Find the nearby sign that spells out when you can and can't park. In London and other big cities, traffic wardens operate with efficiency; if you park on the yellow lines at the wrong time, your car will be clamped or towed away, and it'll cost you £100 or more to get driving again. In some cities there are also red lines, which mean no stopping at all. Ever.

Purchase

If you're planning a long tour around Britain you may want to buy a vehicle. You can find a banger for £300, and a reasonable car for around £1000. If you want a camper van, expect to pay at least £2000 for something reliable. For more ideas on prices, pick up *Autotrader* magazine, or look at www.autotrader.co.uk.

To be on the road, all cars require: third-party insurance – shop around, but expect to pay at least £300; a registration form (log book) – signed by both the buyer and seller; a tax disc – £90/160 for six/12 months (less for small engines); and a Ministry of Transport (MOT) safety certificate – for cars over three years old (valid for one year).

It saves loads of hassle to buy a vehicle with a valid MOT certificate and tax disc; both remain with the car through change of ownership. Third-party insurance goes with the driver rather than the car, so you'll still have to arrange this.

Road Rules

A foreign driving licence is valid in Britain for up to 12 months. If you plan to bring a car from Europe, it's illegal to drive without (at least) third-party insurance. Some other important rules:

- drive on the left (!)
- wear fitted seat belts in cars
- wear crash helmets on motorcycles
- give way to your right at junctions and roundabouts
- always use the left-side lane on motorways and dual-carriageways, unless overtaking (although so many people ignore this rule, you'd think it didn't exist)
- don't use a mobile phone while driving unless it's fully hands-free (another rule frequently flouted).

Speed limits are 30mph in built-up areas, 60mph on main roads, and 70mph on motorways and dual carriageways. Drinking and driving is taken very seriously; you're allowed a blood-alcohol level of 80mg/100mL and campaigners want it reduced to 50mg/100mL.

All drivers should read the *Highway Code*. It's often stocked by tourist offices, and available online at www.roads.dft.gov.uk/roadsafety (and, incidentally, often around seventh place in national nonfiction bestseller lists).

HITCHING

Hitching is not as common as it used to be in Britain, maybe because more people have cars, maybe because few drivers give lifts any more. It's perfectly possible however, if you don't mind long waits, although travellers should understand that they're taking a small but potentially serious risk, and we don't recommend it. If you decide to go by thumb, note that it's illegal to hitch on motorways; you must use approach roads or service stations.

However, as is the case with so many other things, it's all different in remote rural areas such as Mid Wales or northwest Scotland, where hitching is a part of getting around – especially if you're a walker. On some Scottish islands, local drivers may stop and offer a lift without you even asking.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

British cities usually have good local public-transport systems, although buses are often run by a confusing number of companies. The larger cities have tram and underground rail services too. Tourist offices can provide information, and more details are given in the city sections throughout this book.

Bus

All cities have good local bus networks year-round, and in rural areas popular with tourists (especially national parks) there are frequent bus services from Easter to September. Elsewhere in the countryside, bus timetables are designed to serve schools and industry, so there can be few midday and weekend services (and they may stop running in school holidays), or buses may link local villages to a market town on only one day each week. It's always worth double-checking at a tourist office, before you hike to a pretty village on Monday and then discover that the next bus out is on Thursday.

BUS PASSES

If you're taking a few local bus rides in a day of energetic sightseeing, ask about day passes (with names like Day Rover, Wayfarer or Explorer), which will be cheaper than buying several single tickets. If you plan to linger longer in one area, three-day passes are a great bargain. Often they can be bought on your first bus, and may include local rail services. Passes are mentioned in the regional chapters, and it's always worth asking ticket clerks or bus drivers about your options.

POSTBUS

A postbus is a van on mail service that also carries passengers. Postbuses operate in rural areas (and some of the most scenic and remote parts of the country) and are especially useful for walkers and backpackers. For information and timetables contact **Royal Mail Postbus** (☎ 08457 740 740; www.royalmail.com/postbus).

Ferries

Local ferries, from the mainland to the Isle of Wight or the Scottish islands for example, are covered in the relevant sections in the regional chapters.

Taxi

There are two main sorts of taxi in Britain: the famous black cabs (some carry advertising livery in other colours these days) that have meters and can be hailed in the street; and minicabs that can only be called by phone. In London and other big cities, taxis cost £2 to £3 per mile. In rural areas, it's about half this, which means when it's Sunday and you find that the next bus out of the charming town you've just hiked to is on Monday, a taxi can keep you moving. If you call **National Cabline** (☎ 0800 123444) from a landline phone, the service will pinpoint your location and transfer you to an approved local company.

TRAIN

For long-distance travel around Britain, trains are generally faster and more comfortable than coaches, but can be more expensive, although with discount tickets they're competitive – and often take you through beautiful countryside.

In the 1990s rail travel had a bad reputation for delays and cancellations. By 2006 the situation had improved markedly, with around 85% of trains running on (or pretty close to) schedule. (The journeys that are delayed or cancelled mostly have an impact commuters, rather than long-distance leisure travellers.)

About 20 different companies operate train services in Britain (for example, First Great Western runs from London to Bath and Bristol; GNER runs London to Leeds and Edinburgh; Virgin Trains runs a very useful and wide-ranging service all across Britain from its hub in Birmingham, extending to Penzance, Cardiff, Holyhead, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, London and Bournemouth), while Network Rail operates track and stations. For passengers this system can be confusing, but information and ticket-buying services are increasingly centralised.

Your first stop should be **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk), the nationwide timetable and fare-information service. The site also advertises special offers, and has real-time links to station departure boards, so you can see if your train is on time (or not). Once you've found the journey you need, links take you to the relevant train operator or to two centralised ticketing services (www.thetrainline.com and www.Qjump.co.uk) to buy the ticket. These websites can be confusing at first (you always have to state an approximate preferred time and day of travel, even if you don't mind *when* you go), but after using the sites a few times they soon become easy to use, and with a little delving around they can offer some real bargains.

Classes

There are two classes of rail travel: 1st and standard. First class costs around 50% more than standard and, except on very crowded trains, is not really worth it. However, at weekends some train operators offer upgrades: for an extra £10 to £15 on top of your standard class fare you can enjoy more comfort and legroom.

Costs & Reservations

For short journeys (under about 50 miles), it's usually best to buy tickets on the spot at train stations. You may get a choice of express or stopping service – the latter is obviously slower, but can be cheaper, and may take you through charming countryside or grotty suburbs.

For longer journeys, on-the-spot fares are always available, but tickets are much cheaper if bought in advance. (Essentially, the earlier you book, the cheaper it gets.) Fully discounted tickets for longer trips are usually not available at stations at all and must be bought in advance by phone or online. Advance purchase usually gets you a reserved seat, but do remember that the cheapest fares are nonrefundable, so if you miss your train you'll have to buy a new ticket.

If you have to change trains, or use two or more train operators, you still buy one ticket – valid for the whole of your journey. The main railcards are also accepted by all operators.

If you buy by phone or website, you can have the ticket posted to you (UK addresses only), or collect it at the originating station on the day of travel, either at the ticket desk (get there with time to spare, as queues can be long) or via automatic machines.

For short or long trips, fares are usually cheaper outside 'peak' travel times ('peak' is when everyone else is trying to get to/from work). It's worth avoiding Fridaysand Sundays too, as fares are higher on these busy days.

The main fare types are 'open', 'saver' and 'advance', although there are sometimes variations within these main categories (eg, 'super-saver' or 'extra-advance') – and just to keep you on your toes, the different train companies sometimes use different brandnames for these products (eg 'sunshine-saver' or 'capital-advance').

The main features or each type are as follows (with the varying prices of London to York tickets given by way of example).

Open fares (London–York single/return £83/167) are available on the spot or in advance for travel any time, valid for a month.

Saver fares (London–York single/return £71/72) are available on the spot or in advance. The day of outward travel is fixed, but you can change the time (changing the day of travel costs £5), but you can return any day or time, valid for one month. Some restrictions apply (eg no peak travel).

Advance fares (London–York singles from £10 to £30) are available in advance only, up to 6pm day before travel. Valid only on the specified date and time. The earlier you buy, the cheaper the ticket – especially if you travel outside peak times. Tickets are nonrefundable.

If you're making a return journey (ie coming back on the same route), open return fares are usually just under double the single fare, while saver returns are often just a few pounds more than saver singles. Advance return fares are sometimes hard to find, as an increasing number of train operators have followed the lead set by low-cost airlines and offer advance single fares only. This gives you more flexibility and can turn up some amazing bargains, with two advance singles easily undercutting the saver return price.

Children under five travel free on trains; those aged between five and 15 pay half price, except on tickets already heavily discounted. Seniors also get discounts, but again not on already heavily discounted fares.

Train Passes

Local train passes usually cover rail networks around a city (many include bus travel too), and are mentioned in the individual city sections throughout this book.

If you're staying in Britain for a while, passes know as 'railcards' are available. They cost around £20 (valid for one year, available from major stations) and get you a 33% discount on most train fares. On the Family and Network Railcards, children get a 60% discount, and the fee is easily repaid in a couple of journeys. Proof of age and a passport photo may be required. For full details see www.railcard.co.uk.

The Family Railcard covers up to four adults and four children travelling together; the Senior Railcard is for anyone over 60; while you must be 16 to 25, or a full-time UK student, for the Young Person's Railcard.

If you're travelling around southeast England (eg London to Dover, Weymouth, Cambridge or Oxford), a Network Railcard covers up to four adults travelling together outside peak times. For details see www.railcard.co.uk/network/network.htm.

You can get an application form for a Disabled Person's Railcard from stations or from the railcard website. Call ☎ 0191-281 8103 for more details.

For country-wide travel, BritRail passes are good value, but they're only for visitors from overseas and *not available in Britain.* They must be bought in your country of origin from a specialist travel agency. There are many BritRail variants, each available in three different versions: for England only; for the whole of Britain (England, Wales and Scotland); and for the UK and Ireland.

One of the main options is BritRail Consecutive, with unlimited travel on all trains

BIKES ON TRAINS

Bicycles can be taken on most long-distance train journeys for £1 to £3, but space limitations and ridiculously complicated advance-booking regulations often make this difficult. It really seems as if the train operators don't want customers, although with persistence you can usually get where you want, especially if you don't travel at peak times. Start with **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) and have a big cup of coffee or stress-reliever handy.

On local trains outside peak times and on shorter trips in rural areas there's generally much less trouble; bikes can be taken free of charge on a first-come-first-served basis. Even so, there may be space limits.

A final warning: when railways are being repaired, cancelled trains are replaced by buses – and they won't take bikes.

in Britain for four/eight/15/22/30 days costing US$220/310/469/590/700. Anyone getting their money's worth out of the last pass should earn some sort of endurance award. There's also BritRail Flexipass; now you don't have to get on a train every day to get full value. Your options are four/eight/15 days of unlimited travel in Britain within a 60-day period for US$275/400/600. Prices quoted are for adults.

Children's passes are usually half price (or free with some adult passes), and seniors get discounts too. For about 30% extra you can upgrade to 1st class. Other deals include a rail pass combined with the use of a hire car, or travel in Britain combined with one Eurostar journey. For more details see www.britrail.com.

If you don't (or can't) buy a BritRail pass, an All Line Rover (seven/14 days £375/565), gives unlimited travel anywhere on the national rail network and can be purchased in Britain, by anyone. Of the other international passes, Eurail cards are not accepted in Britain, and InterRail cards are only valid if bought in another mainland European country.

Health

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Britain is a healthy place to travel. The National Health Service (NHS) provides an excellent service, free on the point of delivery, which – although Brits may complain – is better than most other countries offer. Across the country, hygiene standards are high (despite what your nose tells you on a crowded tube train) and there are no unusual diseases to worry about. Your biggest risks will be from overdoing activities – physical, chemical or other.

BEFORE YOU GO

No immunisations are mandatory for visiting Britain.

European Economic Area (EEA) nationals can obtain free emergency treatment on presentation of a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) – which replaces the old E111 form – validated in their home country. Reciprocal arrangements between the UK and some other countries around the world (including Australia) allow free emergency medical treatment at hospitals or general practitioners (GPs), and subsidised dental care. For details see the Department of Health's website: www.doh.gov.uk, then follow links to 'Policy & Guidance', 'International' and 'Overseas Visitors'.

Regardless of nationality, anyone receives free emergency treatment at Accident & Emergency departments of NHS hospitals. Travel insurance, however, offers greater flexibility over where and how you're treated, and covers emergency repatriation.

Chemists and pharmacies can advise on minor ailments such as sore throats and earache. In large cities, there's at least one chemist open 24 hours.

NATIONAL HEALTH WEBSITES

If you're visiting Britain from overseas, these travel health websites will be useful:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)
Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)
USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Good sites include:

www.ageconcern.org.uk Advice on travel for the elderly.
www.cdc.gov US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
www.fco.gov.uk/travel For Brits going abroad, but useful for incomers.
www.mariestopes.org.uk Women's health and contraception.
www.mdtravelhealth.com Worldwide recommendations, updated daily.
www.who.int Site of the World Health Organization.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) refers to blood clots forming in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. The chief symptom is swelling or pain in the foot, ankle or calf. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties.

To prevent DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, contract and release leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol.

JET LAG

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones), try drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep and so on) as soon as possible.

IN BRITAIN

SUNBURN

In summertime in Britain, even when there's cloud cover it's possible to get sunburnt surprisingly quickly – especially if you're on water. Use sunscreen, wear a hat and cover up with a shirt and trousers.

WATER

Tap water in Britain is always safe unless there's a sign to the contrary (eg on trains). Don't drink straight from streams in the countryside – you never know what's upstream.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travel through time zones can contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, remember that some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop them from working.

If you're already pregnant, travel is usually possible, but you should always consult your doctor. The most risky times for travel are the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and after 30 weeks.

Language

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Lonely Planet's *British Language & Culture* offers an informative and entertaining look at the history and peculiarities of British English, including section on Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, and a feast of useful words and phrases.

SCOTTISH GAELIC

Scottish Gaelic (*Gàidhlig*, pronounced 'gallic' in Scotland) is spoken by about 80,000 people in Scotland, mainly in the Highlands and islands, and by many native speakers and learners overseas. The language is a member of the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family of languages, which has given us Gaelic, Irish, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and Breton.

Although Scottish Gaelic is the Celtic language most closely associated with Scotland it was quite a latecomer to those shores. Other Celtic languages in the form of Pictish and Brittonic had existed prior to the arrival and settlement by Gaelic-speaking Celts (Gaels) from Ireland from the 4th to the 6th centuries AD. These Irish settlers, known to the Romans as Scotti, were eventually to give their name to the entire country. Initially they settled in the area on the west coast of Scotland in which their name is perpetuated, Earra Ghaidheal (Argyll). As their territorial influence extended so did their language and from the 9th to the 11th centuries Gaelic was spoken throughout the country. For many centuries the language was the same as the language of Ireland; there is little evidence of much divergence before the 13th century. Even up to the 18th century the bards adhered to the strict literary standards of Old Irish.

Viking invasions from AD 800 brought linguistic influences, which are evident in many of the coastal place names of the Highlands.

Gaelic culture flourished in the Highlands until the 18th century and the Jacobite rebellions. After the Battle of Culloden in 1746 many Gaelic speakers were forced off their ancestral lands; this 'ethnic cleansing' by landlords and governments culminated in the Highland Clearances of the 19th century. Although still studied at academic level, the spoken language declined, being regarded as a mere 'peasant' language of no modern significance.

It was only in the 1970s that Gaelic began to make a comeback with a new generation of young enthusiasts who were determined that it should not be allowed to die. People from all over Scotland, and indeed worldwide, are beginning to appreciate their Gaelic heritage.

After two centuries of decline, the language is now being encouraged through financial help from government agencies and the EU. Gaelic education is flourishing from playgroups right through to tertiary level. This renaissance flows out into the fields of music, literature, cultural events and broadcasting. The Gaelic language has a vital role to play in the life of modern Scotland.

Making Conversation

Good morning.	*Madainn mhath.*	mating vah
Good afternoon/Good evening.	*Feasgar math.*	feskur mah
Goodbye. (lit: Blessings go with you)	*Beannachd leat.*	byan·nukhk laht
Goodbye. (The same with you)	*Mar sin leat.*	mar shin laht
Good night.	*Oidhche mhath.*	ai·khuh vah
Please.	*Mas e do thoil e.*	ma·she duh hol eh
Many thanks.	*Móran taing.*	moe·ran tah·eeng
You're welcome.	*'Se do bheatha.*	shey duh veh·huh
What's your name?	*Dé an t-ainm a tha ort?*	jen ta·nam a horsht?
I'm ...	*Is mise ...*	smee·shuh ...
Good health/Cheers!	*Slàinte mhath!*	slaan·chuh vah!

WELSH

The Welsh language belongs to the Celtic branch of the Indo-European language family. Closely related to Breton and Cornish, and more distantly to Irish, Scottish and Manx, it is the strongest Celtic language both in terms of numbers of speakers (over 500,000) and place in society. It was once spoken throughout the island of Britain south of a line between modern Glasgow and Edinburgh, but was gradually pushed westwards by the invading Angles and Saxons following the retreat of the Roman legions in the 5th century. Several thousand Welsh speakers also live in the Welsh colony in Patagonia. Its earliest literature was written towards the end of the 6th century in what is now southern Scotland, when court poets Taliesin and Aneurin pioneered a literary tradition which continued for some 14 centuries.

By the early modern period, Welsh had lost its status as an official language. The Acts of Union with England (1536 and 1542) deprived the language of all administrative functions. However, translations of the Book of Common Prayer (1567) and the Bible (1588) into Welsh gave the language a limited public function again. Up until the Industrial Revolution, most Welsh people spoke only Welsh, and some 50% still spoke Welsh in 1900. Thereafter the language retreated more rapidly, so that by 1961, only 26% were Welsh-speaking and there was general alarm that the language would totally disappear.

The Saunders Lewis BBC radio lecture, *Tynged yr Iaith tuhng-ed uhrr yaith*, 'The Fate of the Language' in 1962 led to the creation of *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg kuhm-day-thas uhrr yaith guhm-raig*, a protest movement in support of the language. It was spearheaded by university students and inspired by pop singers like Dafydd Iwan, and succeeded through campaigns of civil disobedience in winning equal recognition for Welsh in one domain of society after another. Recent figures would suggest that the decline has been halted. The language has reasserted its position in the educational system, with the Welsh-language TV channel S4C since 1983, and in recent years with the resurgence of Welsh as a badge of national identity, particularly among the young.

Wales is famous for having the longest place name in the world – Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch (hlan·vairr·poohl·gwin·gihl·go·gerr·uh·khwirrn·dro·boohl·hlan·tuh·sil·ee·oh·go·go·gokh) – which, translated, means 'St Mary's Church in the hollow of the White Hazel near a rapid whirlpool and the Church of St Tysilio near the Red Cave'. This can be tricky to say after a pint or three of Brains!

Making Conversation

Good morning.		
	Bore da.	bo·rre dah
Good afternoon.		
	Prynhawn da.	pruhn·hown dah
Good night.		
	Nos da.	nohs da
Hello.		
	Sut mae.	sit mai
Goodbye.		
	Hwyl fawr.	hueyl vowrr
Thanks.		
	Diolch.	dee·olkh
What's your name?		
	Beth yw eich enw chi?	beth yu whch en·oo khee?
Cheers!		
	Iechyd da!	yekh·id dah!
How much?		
	Faint?	vaint?

British
Language & Culture
Cor blimey!

Also available from Lonely Planet: *British Language & Culture*

Glossary

The abbreviations (sl) and (cq) indicate slang and colloquialisms.

agister – someone paid to care for stock
aka – also known as
almshouse – accommodation for the aged or needy

bailey – outermost wall of a castle
Bank Holiday – public holiday
bairn – baby (northern England & Scotland)
banger – old, cheap car (cq)
bangers – sausages (cq)
bannock – half-scone-half-pancake (Scotland)
bap – bun
bar – gate (York, and some other northern cities)
barbican – extended gateway in a castle designed to make entry difficult for unwanted guests
beck – stream (northern England)
bent – not altogether legal (sl)
bevvied – drunk (cq)
bevvy – drink (originally from northern England) (cq)
bill – restaurant check
billion – the British billion is a million million (unlike the American billion – a thousand million)
bitter – a type of beer
black pudding – type of sausage made from dried blood and other ingredients
blackhouse – traditional Hebridean dwelling
blatherskite – boastful or talkative person (northern England) (cq)
bloke – man (cq)
böd – a rustic collection of simple hostels (Scotland)
bodge job – poor-quality repair (cq)
bonnet (of car) – hood
boot (of car) – trunk
bothy – originally meaning any hut or shelter, now used mainly to mean shelter or hut for walkers in mountain areas
brae – hill (Scotland)
bridleway – path that can be used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists
broch – defensive tower (Scotland)
Brummie – native of Birmingham (cq)
bum – backside (not tramp, layabout etc) (sl)
BYO – bring your own

Cadw – the Welsh historic monuments agency
caff – abbreviated form of café (cq)
cairn – pile of stones marking path, junction or peak
CalMac – Caledonian MacBrayne, the main Scottish island ferry operator
canny – good; great; wise (northern England)
capital – head of column (in a building)
ceilidh – pronounced kay-lee; a session of traditional song and dance (originally Scottish, now more widely used across Britain)
cenotaph – monument; memorial to person(s) whose remains lie elsewhere
cheers – goodbye; thanks; also a drinking toast
chemist – pharmacist
chine – valley-like fissure leading to the sea (southern England)
chips – sliced deep-fried potatoes, eaten hot (what Americans call 'fries')
circus – junction of several streets, usually circular
clunch – chalk (used in connection with chalk walls in building)
coach – long-distance bus
coaching inn – inn along a stagecoach route, in the days before trains and motor transport, where horses were changed
coasteering – adventurous activity that involves making your way around a rocky coastline by climbing, scrambling, jumping or swimming
cob – mixture of mud and straw for building
cot – small bed for a baby ('crib' to Americans)
couchette – sleeping berth in a train or ferry
courgette – green vegetable ('zucchini' to Americans and Australians)
court – courtyard
crack – good conversation; good times (anglicised version of Gaelic 'craic') (cq)
cream tea – a cup of tea and a scone with jam and cream
crisps – thinly sliced, salted potatoes, eaten cold
croft – plot of land, with adjoining house, worked by the occupiers

dear – expensive
DIY – do-it-yourself, ie home improvements
dodgy – questionable, unreliable (cq)
dolmen – chartered tomb
donkey engine – small (sometimes portable) engine to drive machinery
doocot – dovecote (Scotland)
dosh – money; wealth (cq)
dough – money (cq)
downs – rolling upland, characterised by lack of trees
dram – whisky measure
duvet – quilt replacing sheets and blankets ('doona' to Australians)

EH – English Heritage
en suite room – hotel room with private attached bathroom (ie shower, basin and toilet)
Essex – derogatory adjective meaning showy/tarty (as in 'Essex girl') (sl)
EU – European Union
evensong – daily evening service (Church of England)

fag – cigarette; also boring task (cq)
fagged – exhausted (cq)
fanny – female genitals, not backside (sl)
fell race – tough running-race through hills or moors
fen – drained or marshy low-lying flat land
firth – estuary
fiver – five-pound note (cq)
flat – apartment
flip-flops – plastic sandals with a single strap over toes ('thongs' to Australians)
footpath – path through countryside and between houses, not beside a road (that's called a 'pavement')

gaffer – boss or foreman (cq)
gate – street (York, and some other northern cities)
ginnel – alleyway (Yorkshire)
graft – work (not corruption) (cq)
grand – one thousand (cq)
greasy spoon – cheap café (cq)
grockle – tourist (cq)
gutted – very disappointed (cq)
guv, guvner – from governor, a respectful term of address for owner or boss; can sometimes be used ironically (cq)

hammered – drunk (sl)
hart – deer
heavy – strong ale (Scotland)
HI – Hostelling International (organisation)
hire – rent
hosepipe – garden hose
hotel – accommodation with food and bar, not always open to passing trade
howf – pub or shelter (Scotland)
HS – Historic Scotland; organisation that manages historic sites in Scotland
Huguenots – French Protestants

inn – pub with accommodation

jam – fruit conserve spread on bread
jelly – sweet desert of flavoured gelatine
jumper – woollen item of clothing worn on torso ('sweater' to Americans)

kippers – salted and smoked fish, traditionally herring
kirk – church (northern England & Scotland)
knowes –burial mounds (Scotland)
kyle –strait or channel (Scotland)

lager lout – see *yob*
lass – young woman (northern England & Scotland)
ley – clearing
lift – machine for carrying people up and down in large buildings ('elevator' to Americans)
loch – lake (Scotland)
lock – part of a canal or river that can be closed off and the water levels changed to raise or lower boats
lolly – money (cq); can also mean candy on a stick (possibly frozen)
lorry – truck
love – term of address, not necessarily to someone likable (cq)

machair – grass- and wildflower-covered sand dunes
mad – insane, not angry
manky – low quality; rotten; mouldy (cq)
Martello tower – small, circular tower used for coastal defence
mate – friend of any gender; also term of address, usually male-to-male (cq)
midge – mosquito-like insect
motorway – major road linking cities (equivalent to 'interstate' or 'freeway')
motte – mound on which a castle was built

naff – inferior; in poor taste (cq)
nappies – worn by babies before they're toilet trained ('diapers' to Americans)
Ned – see *yob* (used in Scotland particularly Glasgow, erroneously thought to stand for Non-Educated Delinquent) (cq)
neeps – turnips (northern England & Scotland)
NT – National Trust; organisation that protects historic buildings and land with scenic importance in England and Wales
NTS – National Trust for Scotland
NYMR – North Yorkshire Moors Railway

oast house – building containing a kiln for drying hops
off-license ('offie') – carry-out alcoholic drinks shop
OS – Ordnance Survey
owlers – smugglers

p – pronounced pee; pence (ie 2p is 'two p' not 'two pence' or 'tuppence')
pargeting – decorative stucco plasterwork
pete – fortified house
Pimms – popular English spirit mixed with lemonade, mint and fresh fruit
pint – beer (as in 'let me buy you a pint')
piscina – basin for priests to wash their hands
pissed – drunk (not angry) (sl)
pissed off – angry (sl)
pitch – playing field
ponce – ostentatious or effeminate male; also to borrow (usually permanently) (cq)
pop – fizzy drink (northern England)
postbus – minibus delivering the mail, also carrying passengers
provost – mayor
punter – customer (cq)

queue – line of people waiting, for example, to buy tickets
quid – pound (cq)

ramble – short easy walk
rebud – heraldic device suggesting the name of its owner
reet – right (northern England)
reiver – warrior (historic term – northern England)
return ticket – round-trip ticket
roll-up – roll-your-own cigarette (cq)
RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
rubber – eraser; also (less commonly) condom (sl)
rubbish bin – what Americans call a 'garbage can'
rugger – rugby

sarnie – sandwich (cq)
sarsen – boulder, a geological remnant usually found in chalky areas (sometimes used in Neolithic constructions, eg Stonehenge and Avebury)
sett – tartan pattern
shag – have sex (sl); also a tough or tiring task (cq)
shagged – tired (cq)
sheila-na-gig – Celtic fertility symbol of a woman with exaggerated genitalia, often seen carved in stone on churches and castles; found mainly in the Marches, along the Wales–England border
shout – to buy a group of people drinks, usually reciprocated
shut – partially covered passage
single ticket – one-way ticket
sixth-form college – further-education college
Sloane Ranger – wealthy and superficial, but well-connected, young person
snicket – alleyway (York)
snog – long, drawn-out kiss (not just a peck on the cheek) (cq)
spondulicks – money (cq)
sporran – purse worn with a kilt (Scotland)
SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest
stone – unit of weight equivalent to 14lb or 6.35kg
stovie – tasty pie of meat, mashed onion and fried potato
subway – underpass (for pedestrians)
sweets – what Americans call 'candy' and Australians call 'lollies'

ta – thanks
tatties – potatoes (cq)
thwaite – clearing in a forest (northern England)
TIC – Tourist Information Centre
ton – one hundred (sl)
tor – pointed hill (originally a Celtic word)
torch – flashlight
Tory – Conservative (political party)
towpath – path running beside a river or canal, where horses once towed barges
trainers – running/tennis shoes
traveller – nomadic person (traditional and New Age hippy types)
tron – public weighbridge
tube – London's underground railway (cq)
twit – foolish (sometimes annoying) person (cq)
twitcher – obsessive bird-watcher
twitten – passage; small lane

Underground – London's underground railway system; see also *tube*

VAT – value-added tax, levied on most goods and services, currently 17.5%
verderer – officer upholding law and order in the royal forests

wanker – stupid/worthless person (offensive sl)
wide boy – ostentatious go-getter, usually on the make
wolds – open, rolling countryside
wynd – lane or narrow street (northern England & Scotland)

YHA – Youth Hostels Association
yob – hooligan

GLOSSARY OF RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

abbey – a monastery; a building inhabited by monks or nuns
aisle – passageway or open space along either side of a church's *nave*
ambulatory – processional *aisle* at the east end of a cathedral, behind the altar
apse – semicircular or rectangular area for clergy, traditionally at the east end of the church

baptistry – separate area of a church used for baptisms
barrel vault – semicircular arched roof
boss – covering for the meeting point of the ribs in a *vaulted* roof

brass – memorial, common in medieval churches, consisting of a brass plate set into the floor or a tomb
buttress – vertical support for a wall; see also *flying buttress*

campanile – freestanding belfry or bell tower
chancel – eastern end of the church, usually reserved for choir and clergy
chantry – *chapel* established by a donor for use in their name after death
chapel – small, more private shrine or area of worship off the main body of the church
chapel of ease – *chapel* built for those who lived too far away from the parish church
chapter – clergy who run the cathedral
chapter house – building in a cathedral *close* where the dean meets with the *chapter*
chevet – *chapels* radiating out in a semicircular sweep
choir – area in the church where the choir is seated
clearstory – see *clerestory*
clerestory – a wall of windows above a church's *triforium*
cloister – covered walkway linking the church with adjacent monastic buildings
close – buildings grouped around a cathedral
collegiate – church with a chapter of canons and prebendaries, but not a cathedral
corbel – stone or wooden projection from a wall supporting a beam or arch
crossing – intersection of the *nave* and *transepts* in a church

flying buttress – supporting *buttress* in the form of one side of an open arch
font – basin used for baptisms, usually towards the west end of a church, often in a separate *baptistry*
frater – common or dining room in a medieval monastery

lady chapel – *chapel,* usually at the east end of a cathedral, dedicated to the Virgin Mary
lancet – pointed window in Early English style
lierne vault – *vault* containing many tertiary ribs
minster – church connected to a monastery
misericord – hinged choir seat with a bracket (often elaborately carved) that can be leant against

nave – main body of the church at the western end, where the congregation gather

precincts – see *close*
presbytery – eastern area of the *chancel* beyond the choir, where the clergy operate
priory – religious house governed by a prior
pulpit – raised box where the priest gives sermons

quire – medieval term for *choir*

refectory – monastic dining room
reredos – literally 'behind the back'; backdrop to an altar
rood – archaic word for cross (in churches)
rood screen – screen carrying a *rood* or crucifix, which separates the *nave* from the *chancel*

squint – angled opening in a wall or pillar to allow a view of a church's altar

transepts – north-south projections from a church's *nave,* which is often added at a later date than the original construction. It gives the whole church a cruciform (cross-shaped plan).
triforium – internal wall passage above a church's arcade and below the *clerestory;* behind the triforium is the 'blind' space above the side *aisle*

undercroft – vaulted underground room or cellar

vault – roof with arched ribs, usually in a decorative pattern; see also *barrel vault* and *lierne vault*
vestry – robing room, where the parson/priest keeps his robes and puts them on

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Eastern England

For a region that is largely flat as a pancake, Eastern England is far from featureless. This sweet-edged mix is seasoned by ancient cathedral cities, spiced by a wealth of delightful medieval villages, drizzled by inland waterways and fringed by crisp shingly beaches. But the dollop of cream on the top is undoubtedly the beautiful and venerable city of Cambridge, home of the world-famous university.

Most visitors make a beeline to this time-honoured institution of learning, but it's worth taking time to delve deeper into the region. Within the same county of Cambridgeshire alone are two of England's finest cathedrals at Ely and Peterborough, and one of Europe's top aircraft collections at the Imperial War Museum. Neighbouring Suffolk is a lovely pastoral county peppered with timber-framed villages that seem designed to adorn a chocolate box, and a coast of charming Edwardian seaside resorts.

Further north in Norfolk, visitors are rewarded by rich wildlife reserves and old-fashioned fun on the water, both on its placid Broads and along its varied coastline. Topping the region is the undervisited, underpopulated but undoubtedly lovely county of Lincolnshire, home to a more varied terrain, the captivating hilltop capital of Lincoln and a clutch of stunning stately homes and period towns that are accustomed to starring on the silver screen.

And while Eastern England isn't the best region for agoraphobics or hill-walkers, its smooth uncluttered horizons have their own appeal; giving centre stage to stunning sunsets and the sky-scraping spires of hundreds of churches, cathedrals and colleges built during the region's medieval heyday.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gliding a river punt past historic colleges in **Cambridge** (p465)
- Falling in love with the fairy-pink timber-framed houses of **Lavenham** (p474)
- Popping in to see the Queen at **Sandringham House** (p490)
- Climbing the picturesque cobbled streets of **Lincoln** (p491)
- Cruising through the tranquil waterways of the **Norfolk Broads** (p484)
- Picturing yourself in a period drama in historic **Stamford** (p496)

Lincoln
Stamford
Sandringham House
Norfolk Broads
Cambridge
Lavenham

- POPULATION: 2.66 MILLION
- AREA: 19,000 SQ MILES

History

East Anglia was a major Saxon kingdom and the treasures unearthed in the Sutton Hoo burial ship (see p473) proved that they enjoyed something of the good life here.

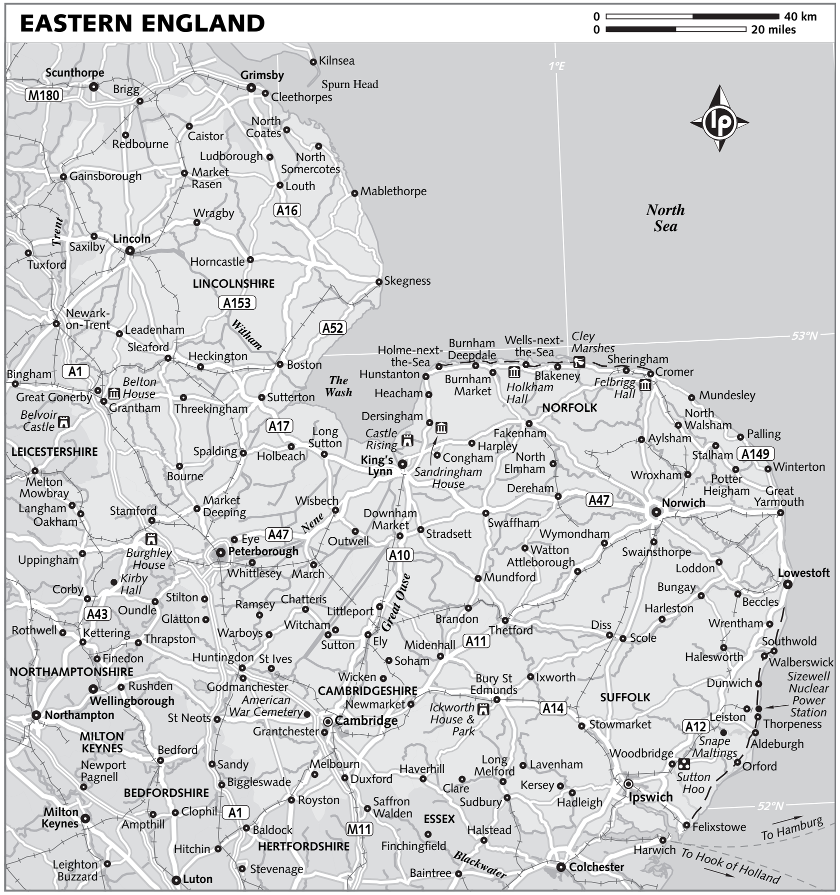
The region's heyday, however, was in the Middle Ages, during the wool and weaving boom. Flemish weavers settled in the area, and the region's long drainage canals, windmills and the architecture also illustrate the cultural crossover with the Continental lowlands. Not to mention the grand churches and world-famous university that the new wealth helped to fund.

By the 17th century the emergence of a work-happy urban bourgeoisie coupled with a strong sense of religious duty resulted in the parliamentarianism and Puritanism that would climax in the Civil War. Oliver Cromwell, the uncrowned king of the parliamentarians, was a small-time merchant residing in Ely when he answered God's call to take up arms against the fattened and corrupt monarchy of Charles I.

Eastern England's fortunes waned in the 18th century, however, when the real Industrial Revolution action was taking place up north. The cottage industries of East Anglia dwindled and today crops have replaced sheep as the rural mainstay.

Information

Regional tourist information can be obtained from the **East of England Tourist Board** (☎ 0870 225 4800; www.visiteastofengland.com).


EASTERN ENGLAND
0 40 km
0 20 miles
North Sea
1°E
53°N
52°N
Kilnsea
Scunthorpe
Grimsby
Spurn Head
M180
Brigg
Cleethorpes
North Coates
Caistor
Redbourne
Ludborough
North Somercotes
Gainsborough
Market Rasen
Louth
Mablethorpe
A16
Wragby
Trent
Saxilby
Lincoln
Tuxford
Horncastle
Skegness
LINCOLNSHIRE
A153
Witham
Newark-on-Trent
Leadenham
A52
Sleaford
Heckington
Boston
Bingham
A1
Belton House
Great Gonerby
Grantham
Threekingham
Sutterton
The Wash
Belvoir Castle
A17
LEICESTERSHIRE
Spalding
Holbeach
Long Sutton
Bourne
Melton Mowbray
Langham
Oakham
Stamford
Market Deeping
Wisbech
Nene
Burghley House
Eye
A47
Peterborough
Uppingham
Whittlesey
March
Kirby Hall
Corby
Stilton
Chatteris
Ramsey
A43
Oundle
Glatton
Littleport
Rothwell
Kettering
Warboys
Witcham
Thrapston
Sutton
Ely
Finedon
Huntingdon
St Ives
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Rushden
Godmanchester
Wicken
Wellingborough
American War Cemetery
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Northampton
St Neots
Newmarket
Cambridge
Grantchester
MILTON KEYNES
Bedford
Newport Pagnell
Sandy
Melbourn
Biggleswade
Duxford
BEDFORDSHIRE
Royston
Milton Keynes
Clophill
A1
Saffron Walden
Ampthill
Baldock
M11
Hitchin
HERTFORDSHIRE
Stevenage
Leighton Buzzard
Luton
Holme-next-the-Sea
Burnham Deepdale
Wells-next-the-Sea
Cley Marshes
Sheringham
Cromer
Hunstanton
Burnham Market
Blakeney
Holkham Hall
Felbrigg Hall
Heacham
Mundesley
NORFOLK
North Walsham
Dersingham
Castle Rising
Fakenham
Aylsham
Palling
King's Lynn
Harpley
Congham
Sandringham House
North Elmham
Stalham
A149
Winterton
Wroxham
Potter Heigham
Great Yarmouth
Dereham
A47
Norwich
Downham Market
Stradsett
Swaffham
Outwell
Wymondham
A10
Watton
Attleborough
Swainsthorpe
Loddon
Lowestoft
Great Ouse
Mundford
Bungay
Beccles
Brandon
Harleston
Thetford
Wrentham
Diss
Scole
Mildenhall
A11
Southwold
Soham
Halesworth
Walberswick
Ixworth
Bury St Edmunds
Dunwich
Sizewell Nuclear Power Station
SUFFOLK
Ickworth House & Park
A14
Leiston
Stowmarket
A12
Thorpeness
Snape Maltings
Aldeburgh
Long Melford
Lavenham
Woodbridge
Haverhill
Orford
Clare
Kersey
Sutton Hoo
Sudbury
Hadleigh
Ipswich
ESSEX
Halstead
Felixstowe
To Hamburg
Finchingfield
Blackwater
Harwich
To Hook of Holland
Baintree
Colchester

Activities

Regional tourist websites are packed with walking, cycling and sailing information, and tourist offices are stacked high with leaflets, maps and guides covering activities offered in the area.

CYCLING

The region is famously flat, so even the unfit can find vast swaths of Eastern England for a gentle potter on two wheels. All four counties boast networks of quiet country lanes, where the biggest natural hazard is the wind sweeping in unimpeded from the coast. When it's behind you, though, you can freewheel for miles. Cambridge is internationally celebrated as a bike-friendly city and an excellent base for cycle tours. There's also gorgeous riding to be had along the Suffolk and Norfolk coastlines and in the Fens. Mountain bikers can head for Thetford Forest, near Thetford, while much of the popular on- and off-road Peddars Way (see below) walking route is also open to cyclists.

WALKING

Flat as an open palm, Eastern England is not everybody's idea of classic walking country. But itchy hiking feet can still be well satisfied with gentle rambles through farmland, beside rivers and lakes and along the wildlife-rich coastline.

The well-known **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** is a six-day, 88-mile national trail from Knettishall Heath near Thetford to Cromer on the coast. The first half trails along an ancient Roman road, then finishes by meandering along the beaches, sea walls, salt marshes and fishing villages of the coast. Day-trippers and weekend walkers tend to dip into its coastal stretches, which also cover some of the best bird-watching country in England. The handy Peddars Wayfarer bus service (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddarsway; twice daily March to October) can whisk you to and from points en route.

Curving round further south, the 50-mile **Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path** wanders between Felixstowe and Lowestoft, via Snape Maltings, Aldeburgh, Dunwich and Southwold, but is also good for shorter rambles.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

With wind and water so abundant here, it's no surprise that **sailing** is all the rage on the coast and in the Norfolk Broads, where you can easily hire boats and arrange lessons. Mind you, many people simply opt to put-put their way around the Broads in **motorboats** these days. More watery fun can be had in Cambridge, where the daring can try their hand at a spot of **punting**. Alternatively, landlubbers can take advantage of the long, wide and frequently empty beaches of the Norfolk coast by **land yachting**, a growing sport in the region.

Getting There & Around

Getting about the region on public transport, both rail and coach, is straightforward. **One Anglia** (☎ 0845 600 7245; www.onerailway.com) offers some handy regional rail passes to explore Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire; the one-day pass (£11) can be used for unlimited regional travel after 9am, while the three-day pass (£22) covers any three separate days over a period of seven days. For train travel in Lincolnshire, **Central Trains** (www.centraltrains.co.uk) has Day Ranger tickets (£16.50). For public transport information, consult **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk).

BIZARRE ENGLAND

What? The English? Eccentric? Well, maybe just a little. Eastern England certainly has its fair share of bizarre events to prove it. Where else could you find the annual **World Snail Racing Championships** than at Congham, about 7 miles east of King's Lynn? Every year here in mid-July around 300 snails battle it out for a tankard full of juicy lettuce leaves. Visitors can enter their own pet invertebrate, complete with painted shell.

And for further proof that the English never quite grow out of childhood pranks, witness the annual **World Pea Shooting Championships**, in which contestants blast dried peas through a tube at various targets. The games take place in early July on the Village Green at Witcham, about 8 miles west of Ely.

And in the village of Stilton, a few miles south of Peterborough, every May Day Bank Holiday sees teams in fancy dress scramble along the High St to become **Stilton cheese rolling champions**.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Start your weekend in style by snagging a river-view room at **Cambridge Garden House** (p466) and venture out for a nightcap at celebrated pub the **Eagle** (p467). Next morning check out the university colleges, dip into the sublime **King's College Chapel** (p462) and then reward yourself with lunch at swanky **Midsummer House** (p467). In the afternoon, work off your excesses by **punting** (p465) along the Backs before bidding farewell to the dreamy spires and breezing east to the **Stour Valley** (p473) and the time-transcending streets of gorgeous **Lavenham** (p474). Install yourself in the spectacular and none-too-frugal **Lavenham Priory** (p474), and explore the town's higgledy-piggledy lanes to work up an appetite for steak-and-ale pies at ancient inn the **Angel** (p475). On Sunday morning roll west to check out the twin stately homes of **Long Melford** (p473) to remind yourself how the other half lives, before heading back to your own cosy abode.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking Cambridgeshire equals Cambridge, the breathtakingly beautiful city and world-renowned brains trust where a visit feels like plunging into the past and meeting the future rolled into one. And the university rightly tops any agenda to the region. But don't let Cambridge's dazzling attractions blind you to the county's other charms. Anywhere else, the extraordinary cathedrals at Peterborough and Ely would steal the limelight, and the rip-roaring Imperial War Museum would leave everyone from aeroplane-obsessed kids to their nostalgic grandparents wriggling with anticipation. Flat as an ironing board, the county also offers leisurely cycling through reclaimed fen, lush farmland and across myriad waterways. A nightmare for agoraphobics, the vast open landscapes nonetheless impress with epic sunsets and unsullied horizons.

Getting Around

The region's public transport radiates from Cambridge, which is a mere 55 minutes' train ride from London. This line continues north through Ely to King's Lynn in Norfolk. From Ely, branch lines run east through Norwich, southeast into Suffolk, and northwest to Peterborough and into Lincolnshire. The useful *Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Passenger Transport Map* is available at all tourist offices or you can call **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk).

CAMBRIDGE

☎ 01223 / pop 108,863

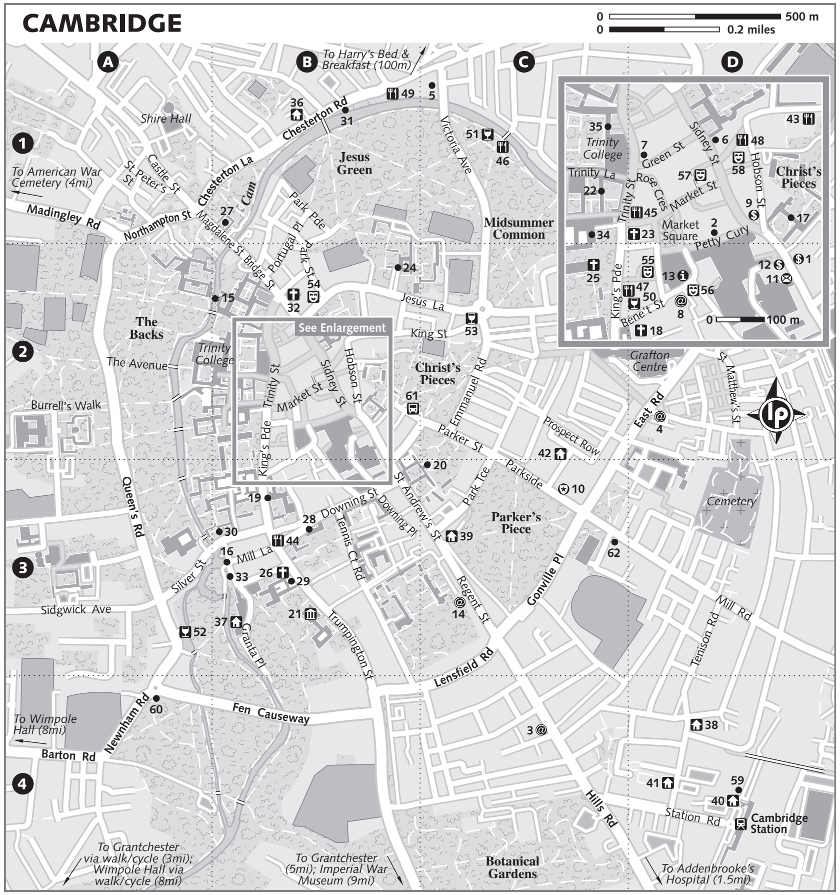
Few cities can take the breath away quite like Cambridge. It's not just its tightly packed core of exquisite architecture, or even the mind-boggling mass of brain power that has passed through its world-famous university, but it's also the sensation of drowning in history, tradition and quirky ritual that only seems to deepen the more you discover. But so too there is plentiful opportunity to come up for air, relaxing in the manicured college gardens, punting along the beautiful river 'Backs' and roaming the lush water meadows that run out of the city.

And of course Cambridge is no mere repository of history and charm, it is very much a living city; its narrow streets are alive with the click and whirr of cyclists. The river is clogged with red-faced rowers, drifting punts and on occasion floundering freshmen. College porters still potter around in bowler hats, while gowned students wine and dine in cavernous medieval halls. Historic pubs echo with the same equal mix of intellectual banter and rowdy merrymaking that they have for centuries. And a new generation of designer boutiques, coffee houses and slick nightlife venues is finding its niche in among the intriguing passageways and medieval doorways of the old town.

While you'll find all these qualities and more in 'the other place' (as rival Oxford is referred to here), Cambridge is the more concentrated of England's two great university cities, and in our humble opinion, far the prettier.

History

The University of Cambridge celebrates its 800th birthday in 2009, and its eventful eight


CAMBRIDGE
500 m
0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To Harry's Bed & Breakfast (100m)
Shire Hall
To American War Cemetery (4mi)
Castle St
St Peter's St
Chesterton Rd
Chesterton La
Jesus Green
Victoria Ave
Madingley Rd
Northampton St
Magdalene St
Bridge St
Cam
Park Pde
Portugal Pl
Park St
Midsummer Common
Jesus La
King St
The Backs
Trinity College
The Avenue
Burrell's Walk
See Enlargement
Trinity St
Market St
Sidney St
Hobson St
King's Pde
Christ's Pieces
Emmanuel Rd
Parker St
Prospect Row
Parkside
Park Tce
East Rd
St Matthew's St
Grafton Centre
Parker's Piece
Downing St
Downing Pl
St Andrew's St
Tennis Ct Rd
Mill La
Silver St
Queen's Rd
Sidgwick Ave
Regent St
Gonville Pl
Cemetery
Mill Rd
Tenison Rd
Trumpington St
Granta Pl
Lensfield Rd
Fen Causeway
Newnham Rd
To Wimpole Hall (8mi)
Barton Rd
Hills Rd
Station Rd
Cambridge Station
To Grantchester via walk/cycle (3mi); Wimpole Hall via walk/cycle (8mi)
To Grantchester (5mi); Imperial War Museum (9mi)
Botanical Gardens
To Addenbrooke's Hospital (1.5mi)
Trinity La
Green St
Rose Cres
Market Square
Petty Cury
Bene't St
100 m

INFORMATION		
Abbey National Bank	1	D2
Boots	2	D1
Budget Internet Café	3	C4
CB2	4	D2
Cleanomat Dry Cleaners & Laundrette	5	C1
Galloway & Porter	6	D1
Heffers	7	D1
International Telecom Centre	8	D2
Lloyds TSB (bank)	9	D1
Police Station	10	C3
Post Office	11	D2
Thomas Cook	12	D2
Tourist Office	13	D2
Victoria Café	14	C3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Bridge of Sighs	15	B2
Cambridge Chauffer Punts	16	B3
Christ's College	17	D1
Church of St Bene't	18	D2
Corpus Christi College	19	B3
Emmanuel College	20	C3
Fitzwilliam Museum	21	B3
Gonville & Caius College	22	C1
Great St Mary's Church	23	D1
Jesus College	24	B2
King's College Chapel	25	C2
Little St Mary's	26	B3
Magdalene College	27	B1
Pembroke College	28	B3
Peterhouse College	29	B3
Queens' College	30	B3
Riverboat Georgina	31	B1
Round Church	32	B2
Scudamore's	33	B3
Senate House	34	C1
Trinity College	35	C1
SLEEPING		
Arundel House Hotel	36	B1
Cambridge Garden House	37	B3
Cambridge YHA Hostel	38	D4
De Vere University Arms Hotel	39	C3
Sleeperz	40	D4
Tenison Towers Guest House	41	D4
Warkworth House	42	C2
EATING		
Clowns	43	D1
Fitzbillies	44	B3
Michaelhouse	45	D1
Midsummer House	46	C1
Rainbow Vegetarian Bistro	47	D2
Tatties	48	D1
Twenty-Two	49	B1
DRINKING		
Eagle	50	D2
Fort St George	51	C1
Granta (and Punt Hire)	52	A3
St Radegund	53	C2
ENTERTAINMENT		
ADC Theatre	54	B2
Arts Theatre	55	D2
Corn Exchange	56	D2
Fez	57	D1
Twentytwo	58	D1
TRANSPORT		
Cambridge Station Cycles	59	D4
City Cycle Hire	60	A4
Drummer St Bus Station	61	B2
Mike's Bikes	62	C3

centuries are inextricably linked to the history of England and even, thanks to some of the earthshaking discoveries made here, also of worldwide import.

First a Roman fort and then a Saxon settlement, Cambridge was little more than a rural backwater until 1209, when the university town of Oxford exploded in a riot between townspeople ('town') and scholars ('gown'), forcing a group of students to quit while their heads were still intact and move to Cambridge to found a new university. The plan was for tutors and students to live together in a community, much as a monastery. This collegiate system, unique to Oxford and Cambridge, came into being gradually, and the first Cambridge college, Peterhouse, was founded in 1284.

More colleges followed from the 14th century, founded by all manner of great and good: royalty, nobility, church figures, statesmen, academics, trade guilds and anyone rich enough to court the prestige that their own institution offered. All the colleges were for men only until, in 1869 and 1871, women were finally allowed to study here with the founding of women-only Girton and Newnham Colleges. However, the girls had to wait until 1948 to actually graduate.

The honour roll of famous graduates reads like an international who's who of high achievers, and a list of their accomplishments could fill several libraries. The discovery of DNA and theories of gravity and evolution: all by Cambridge students. Since 1904 the university has produced 81 Nobel Prize winners (more than any other institution in the world), 13 British prime ministers, nine archbishops of Canterbury, an immense number of scientists, and a healthy host of poets and other scribblers…and this is but a limited selection. Today it remains at the top of the research league in British universities, and in the top three worldwide, and international academics have polled it the top university in the world for science.

Orientation

The colleges and university buildings comprise the centre of the city. The central area, lying in a wide bend of the River Cam, is easy to get around on foot or by bike. The best-known section of the Cam is the Backs, which combines lush river scenery with superb views of six colleges, and King's College Chapel. The other 25 colleges are scattered throughout the city. The bus station is central on Drummer St, but the train station is a 20-minute walk to the south.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Galloway & Porter (☎ 367876; 30 Sidney St) Remaindered and damaged stock.

Heffers (☎ 568568; 20 Trinity St) Vast temple of academic tomes and lighter reads.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 358966; Parkside)

INTERNET ACCESS

The going rate for internet access is £1 per hour.

Budget Internet Café (☎ 464625; 30 Hills Rd; 🕒 9am-11pm)

CB2 (☎ 508503; 5-7 Norfolk St; 🕒 noon-midnight)

International Telecom Centre (☎ 357358; 2 Wheeler St; 🕒 9am-10pm)

Victoria Café (☎ 307272; 86 Regent St; 🕒 8am-10pm)

LAUNDRY

Cleanomat Dry Cleaners & Laundrette (☎ 464719; 10 Victoria Ave; per wash £2; 🕒 8.30am-9pm)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Cambridge Station Cycles (☎ 307125; Station Bldg, Station Rd; 🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) Stores left luggage for £3 per day.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Addenbrooke's Hospital (☎ 245151; Hills Rd)

Boots (☎ 350213; 28 Petty Cury)

MONEY

Helpful banks and bureaux de change:

Abbey National (☎ 350495; 60 St Andrew's St)

Lloyds TSB (☎ 0845 072 3333; 3 Sidney St)

Thomas Cook (☎ 543100; 8 St Andrew's St)

POST

Main post office (☎ 323325; 9-11 St Andrew's St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The large bustling **tourist office** (☎ 0871 266 8006; www.visitcambridge.org; Wheeler St; ⌚ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-Mar) helps with maps, accommodation, tours and tickets. A £2.50 Visitor Card from here will get you three weeks' worth of discounts in restaurants, attractions and on guided tours.

Sights

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

Five of the university colleges – King's, Queens', Clare, Trinity and St John's – charge tourists admission. Some other colleges deem visitors too disruptive and often deny them entry. Most colleges close to visitors for the Easter term and all are closed for exams from mid-May to mid-June. Opening hours vary year to year, so contact the colleges, the tourist office or the university's **central information service** (☎ 337733) for updates.

King's College Chapel

In a city crammed with show-stopping architecture, this is *the* show-stealer. Chances are you will already have seen it on a thousand postcards, tea towels and choral CDs before you catch your first glimpse of the grandiose realty of **King's College Chapel** (☎ 331212; www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel; King's Pde; adult/concession £4.50/3; ⌚ during term 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.15pm-2.30pm Sun, outside academic terms 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun), but still it awes. It's one of the most extraordinary examples of Gothic architecture in Britain, and was begun in 1446 as an act of piety by Henry VI and finished by Henry VIII around 1516.

While you can enjoy stunning front and back views of the chapel from King's Pde and the river, the real drama is within. Mouths drop open upon first glimpse of the inspirational **fan-vaulted ceiling**, its intricate tracery soaring upwards before exploding into a series of stone fireworks. This vast 80m-long canopy is the work of John Wastell and is the largest expanse of fan vaulting in the world.

The chapel's length is also remarkably light, its sides flanked by lofty **stained-glass windows** that retain their original glass, rare survivors of the excesses of the Civil War in this region. It's said that these windows were ordered to be spared by Cromwell himself, who knew of their beauty from his own studies in Cambridge.

The antechapel and the choir are divided by a superbly carved **wooden screen**, designed and executed by Peter Stockton for Henry VIII. The screen bears his master's initials entwined with those of Anne Boleyn. Look closely and you may find an angry human face – possibly Stockton's – amid the elaborate jungle of mythical beasts and symbolic flowers. Above is the magnificent bat-wing organ, originally constructed in 1686 though much altered since.

The thickly carved wooden stalls just beyond the screen are a stage for the chapel's world-famous **choir**, whose Festival of the Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve are beamed all over the globe. And even the most pagan heavy-metal fan will get shivers down the spine during **evensong** (admission free; ⌚ 5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am & 3.30pm Sun mid-Jan–mid-Mar, mid-Apr–mid-Jun, mid-late Jul, Oct-early Dec & 24 & 25 Dec), in which the sound waves almost seem to mirror and mingle with the extraordinary ceiling.

Beyond the dark-wood choir, light suffuses the **high altar**, which is framed by Rubens' masterpiece *Adoration of the Magi* (1634) and the magnificent east window. An eye-opening **Chapel Exhibition** is in the side chapels left of the altar, and charts the stages and methods of building set against its historical panorama.

Audio tours of the chapel are available for £2, and guided tours can be arranged at the tourist office.

Trinity College

As you walk through the impressive Tudor gateway to **Trinity College** (☎ 338400; www.trin.cam.ac.uk; Trinity St; adult/child £2.20/1.30), first created in 1546, have a look at the statue of the college's founder Henry VIII that adorns it. His left hand holds a golden orb, while his right grips not the original sceptre but a table leg, put there by student pranksters and never replaced. It's a wonderful introduction to one of Cambridge's most venerable colleges, and a reminder of who really rules the roost.

As you enter the **Great Court**, scholastic humour gives way to wonderment, for it is the largest of its kind in the world and drips with history. To the right of the entrance is a small tree, planted in the 1950s and reputed to be a descendant of the apple tree made famous by Trinity alumnus Sir Isaac Newton. Other alumni include Tennyson, Francis Bacon, Lord Byron and at least nine prime ministers, British and international, and a jaw-dropping 31 Nobel Prize winners.

The square is also the scene of the run made famous by the film *Chariots of Fire* – 350m in

43 seconds (the time it takes the clock to strike 12). Although many students attempt it, Harold Abrahams (the hero of the film) never actually did, and the run wasn't even filmed here. If you fancy your chances remember that you'll need Olympian speed to even come close.

The college's vast hall has a dramatic hammer-beam roof and lantern, and beyond this are the dignified cloisters of Nevile's Court and the renowned **Wren Library** (☎ 338400; ⌚ noon-2pm Mon-Fri, plus during term 10.30am-12.30pm Sat). It contains 55,000 books dated before 1820 and more than 2500 manuscripts, including AA Milne's original *Winnie the Pooh*. Both he (Milne that is, not Winnie) and his son, Christopher Robin, were graduates.

Henry VIII would have been proud to note, too, that his college would eventually come to throw the best party in town, its lavish college May Ball in June.

Gonville & Caius

Known locally as Caius (pronounced keys), this fascinating old **college** (☎ 332400; www.cai.cam.ac.uk; Trinity St) was founded twice, first by a priest called Gonville, in 1348, and then again in 1557 by Dr Caius, a brilliant physician who supposedly spoilt his legacy by insisting the college admit no 'deaf, dumb, deformed, lame, chronic invalids, or Welshmen'! Given his attitude to the disabled, it's a darn good thing he wasn't around to deny wheelchair-bound megastar of astrophysics, Stephen Hawking, who is a fellow here. Of special interest are its three gates: Virtue, Humility and Honour. They symbolise the progress of the good student, since the third gate (the *Porta Honoris,* a fabulous domed and sundial-sided confection) leads to the Senate House and thus graduation.

Christ's College

Grand old institution **Christ's** (☎ 334900; www.christs.cam.ac.uk; St Andrew's St; ⌚ 9am-dusk) celebrated its 500th birthday in 2005 and is worth visiting if only for its gleaming Great Gate emblazoned with heraldic carving of spotty Beaufort yale (antelope-like creatures), Tudor roses and portcullis. Its founder Lady Margaret Beaufort hovers above like a guiding spirit. A stout oak door leads into First Court, which has an unusual circular lawn, magnolias and wisteria creepers. Pressing on through the Second Court there is a gate to the fellows' garden, which contains a mulberry tree under which 17th-century poet John Milton reputedly wrote *Lycidas*. Naturalist Charles Darwin also studied here.

Jesus College

A comical rebus or heraldic pun crowns the main gate of this late-15th-century **college** (☎ 339339; www.jesus.cam.ac.uk; Jesus Lane), which is accessed via a handsome bricked approach nicknamed 'the chimney'. Here you'll see a clutch of red-faced cockerels to represent the 'cock' and a globe to represent the 'all' in the college founder's name, Bishop Alcock. Inside, it's an unusually tranquil place, perhaps because it was once a nunnery before the bishop expelled the nuns for misbehaving. Be sure to visit the stunning chapel, which has a Norman arched gallery from the nunnery building, a 13th-century chancel and Art Nouveau features by Pugin, William Morris (ceilings), Burne-Jones (stained glass) and Madox Brown.

Magdalene College

Originally a Benedictine hostel, this appealing riverside **college** (☎ 332100; www.magd.cam.ac.uk; Magdalene St) was refounded in 1542 by Lord Audley. It has the dubious honour of being the last college to allow women students; when they were finally admitted in 1988, male students wore black armbands and flew the college flag at half-mast. Its greatest asset is the Pepys Library, housing the magnificent collection of books the famous mid-17th-century diarist bequeathed to his old college.

Corpus Christi College

Entry to this illustrious **college** (☎ 338000; www.corpus.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St) is via the so-called New Court that dates back about 200 years. The door to the chapel here is flanked by two statues; on the right is Matthew Parker, who was college master in 1544 and Archbishop of Canterbury to Elizabeth I. A bright lad, Mr Parker was known for his curiosity; his endless questioning gave us the term 'nosy parker'. Meanwhile monastic atmosphere still oozes from the inner Old Court, which retains its medieval form. Playwright and Shakespeare's contemporary Christopher Marlowe (1564–93), author of *Dr Faustus* and *Tamburlaine,* was a Corpus man – as a plaque, next to a fascinating sundial, bears out. The college library has the finest collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the world.

Queens' College

This gorgeous **college** (☎ 335511; www.queens.cam.ac.uk; Silver St; adult £1.50) sits elegantly astride the river and takes its name from two queens who founded it in the 15th century. For visitors, the college's main entrance is off Queens' Lane and this is where its two most enchanting medieval courtyards are found: Old Court and especially Cloister Court, unmistakable for its intimate cloisters and matchbox lawn that irresistibly call to mind images of distracted academics in slippers and poets draped in the corners. Here too is the beautiful half-timbered President's Lodge and the tower in which famous Dutch scholar and reformer Erasmus lodged from 1510 to 1514. Old Ras wasn't particularly enamoured of Cambridge: he thought that the wine tasted like vinegar, that the beer was slop and that the place was too expensive, but he did note that the local women were good kissers.

Peterhouse College

The oldest and smallest college, **Peterhouse** (☎ 338200; www.pet.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St) will leave you wanting to slip it into your handbag to take home. Founded in 1284 by Hugo de Balsham, later Bishop of Ely, it stands just south of the **Little St Mary's Church**. The church's unwieldy original name was St Peter's-without-Trumpington-Gate, which gave the college its name. Inside is a memorial to student Godfrey Washington, great-uncle of George. His family coat of arms was the stars and stripes, the inspiration for the US flag. Henry Cavendish, the first person to measure the density of water, also studied here. He also calculated the planet's weight: about six billion trillion metric tonnes if you must know.

Much of Peterhouse has been rebuilt or added over the years, including the exceptional little chapel built in 1632, but the main hall is bona fide 13th century and beautifully restored.

Emmanuel College

Neither too big nor too small and surprisingly tranquil, this 16th-century **college** (☎ 334200; St Andrew's St) is particularly famous for two things. The first is facing you as you enter its Front Court: the 1677 Wren chapel, cloister and gallery is an architectural gem. And there's a plaque nearby commemorating its other oft-repeated claim to fame, which is that it educated one of America's most famous educators. John Harvard (BA 1632) was a scholar here before he settled in New England and left his money to found his namesake university in the Massachusetts town of Cambridge. His portrait also graces one of the chapel's stained-glass windows – but, as the artist had no likeness of Harvard from which to work, he used the face of Harvard's college contemporary John Milton!

THE BACKS

Ah, the Backs. The place to be on a sunny day, these idyllic parklands line the river behind some of the most famous colleges and eat up camera films with their picture-postcard views of the college walls, graceful bridges, weeping willows and neatly manicured lawns upon which students picnic. There are several interesting bridges, especially the fanciful **Bridge of Sighs** (built in 1831) and the oldest crossing at **Clare College**, built in 1639 and ornamented with decorative balls. Its architect was paid a grand total of 15p for his design and, feeling aggrieved at such a measly fee, it's said he cut a chunk out of one of the balls adorning the balustrade so the bridge would never be complete. Most curious of all is the flimsy-looking wooden construction joining the two halves of Queens' College known as the **Mathematical Bridge**, first built in 1749. Don't fall prey to the punt-chauffeur's rose-tinted myths that it was the handiwork of Sir Isaac Newton or originally built without any nails, though. Whether it would actually hold without the nuts and bolts we'll leave to the university mathematicians to resolve.

GREAT ST MARY'S CHURCH

Cambridge's staunch university **church** (☎ 741716; Senate House Hill; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun, to 5pm Jun-Aug) was built between 1478 and 1519 in the late-Gothic perpendicular style. A quirky fact about the church is that it's home to England's oldest bell-ringing society. If you're fit and fond of a view, climb the 123 steps of the **tower** (adult/child £2/1) past the cacophonous bells for superb vistas of the dreamy spires, albeit marred by wire fencing.

The beautiful classical building directly across King's Pde is the **Senate House**, designed in 1730 by James Gibbs; graduations are held here in summer when gowned and mortar-boarded students parade the streets to pick up those all-important scraps of paper.

ROUND CHURCH

The pop-up-book pretty **Round Church** (☎ 311602; Bridge St; adult/child £1/free; 🕒 1-5pm Sun-Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) is another of Cambridge's most visited gems and one of only four such structures in England. It was built by the mysterious Knights Templar in 1130 and shelters an unusual circular nave ringed by chunky Norman pillars. It now houses an exhibition on, shows videos about and runs walking tours on Cambridge's Christian heritage.

CHURCH OF ST BENE'T

The oldest structure in the county, the **Saxon tower** of this Franciscan **church** (Bene't St) was built around 1025. The round holes above the belfry windows were designed to offer owls nesting privileges; they were valued as mouse killers. The church also has a bible that belonged to Thomas Hobson, owner of a nearby livery stable, who told customers they could hire any horse they liked as long as it was the one nearest the door – hence the term 'Hobson's choice', meaning no choice at all.

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

Fondly dubbed 'the Fitz' by locals, this colossal neoclassical pile was one of the first public **art museums** (☎ 332900; www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) in Britain, built to house the fabulous treasures that the seventh Viscount Fitzwilliam had bequeathed to his old university. Particularly in the entrance hall, this unabashedly over-the-top building sets out to mirror its contents in an ostentatious jumble of styles that mixes mosaic with marble, Greek with Egyptian, and more. It was begun by George Basevi in 1837, but he did not live to see its completion: while working on Ely Cathedral he stepped back to admire his handiwork, slipped and fell to his death.

The lower galleries are filled with priceless treasures from ancient Egyptian sarcophagi to Greek and Roman art, Chinese ceramics to English glass, and some dazzling illuminated manuscripts. The upper galleries shine with an incandescent collection of paintings by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Rubens, the Impressionists, Gainsborough and Constable, right through to Rembrandt and Picasso.

Activities

PUNTING

Gliding a self-propelled punt along the Backs is a blissful experience once you've got the knack, though it can also be a wobbly-legged and manic challenge to begin. If you wimp out you can always opt for a relaxing chauffeured punt.

Cambridge Chauffer Punts (☎ 354164; www.punting-in-cambridge.co.uk; Silver St; per hr £14, chauffeured £50)

Granta (☎ 301845; Newnham Rd; per hr £10) A pub that hires punts on the side.

Scudamore's (☎ 359750; www.scudamores.com; Silver St; per hr £12, chauffeured £40)

WALKING & CYCLING

For an easy stroll into the countryside, you won't find a prettier route than the 3-mile walk to Grantchester following the meandering River Cam and its punters southwest through flower-flecked meadows.

Scooting around town on a bike is easy thanks to the pancake-flat landscape, although the surrounding countryside can get a bit monotonous. The Cambridge tourist office stocks several useful guides including the free *Cambridge Cycle Route Map*.

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 0871 666 0000; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £9/4.50; 🕒 10am-4pm) Hop-on hop-off tour buses that run every 20 to 30 minutes. You can get on or off at 16 points along the route, including the train station, Fitzwilliam Museum, the Round Church and the American Military Cemetery.

Riverboat Georgina (☎ 307694; www.georgina.co.uk; depending on food/refreshments per person £12-23) Two-hour cruises from the river at Jesus Lock. Four-hour cruises may also be available.

Tourist Tracks (☎ 305847; www.tourist-tracks.com) For those who prefer to wander at their own pace, there are MP3 walking tours of the city. They can be downloaded for £5, mail ordered on CD for £7 or hired with an MP3 player at the tourist office for £6. The pack contains four separate 30-minute tours of the city centre.

Walking tours (☎ 457574; tours@cambridge.gov.uk; 🕒 1.30pm daily, sometimes with extra tours at 10.30am, 11.30am and 2.30pm depending on season; tickets including entry to King's/St John's Colleges £9/7) The tourist office arranges these, as well as other less frequent tours such as colourful 'Ghost Tours' (adult/concession/child under seven £14/12/7) and 'Punt and Pint Tours' (adult/concession/child under 12 £20/17.50/10). The tourist office has more details; book in advance.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Cambridge YHA (☎ 0870 770 5742, 354601; www.yha.org.uk; 97 Tenison Rd; dm £17; ☒ 💻) The cheapest digs in the city and a position just 600m from the train station make this L-shaped hostel the busiest in the region. Basically sound, the dorms are small, functional and well worn. Lockers and laundry available. Breakfasts can be a harried affair, however, due to large groups.

Tenison Towers Guest House (☎ 363924; www.cambridgecitytenisontowers.com; 148 Tenison Rd; s/d £30/55) The aroma of freshly baked muffins greets you at this home-style B&B just 300m from the train station. As well as bubbly personal service, it has a cute little patio, comfortably furnished rooms with hand-sponged walls and yes, muffins on the menu for breakfast.

MIDRANGE

Sleeperz (☎ 304050; www.sleeperz.com; Station Rd; s/tw/d from £39/49/59; 🅿 🚭) Sitting amid a lawn of bicycles beside the train station is this converted warehouse with beamed ceiling and iron shutters, housing a one-night-wonder hotel that welcomes tired arrivals late into the night. Its pint-sized rooms squeeze in minuscule en suite, TV and functional futon or cabin-style bunk bed, all spotless but so snug that early-morning stretches may result in bruising. Doubles are larger.

Harry's Bed & Breakfast (☎ 503866; www.welcometoharrys.co.uk; 39 Milton Rd; s £45-56, d £65; 🅿 🚭 wi-fi) Originally an Edwardian nursing home, this lively four-room B&B is a gem. Its perennially cheerful host bends over backwards for guests, and the en suite rooms are tastefully decorated in warm colours and modern furnishings. One has a shared toilet, but shower and basin within. Rates include free wi-fi and, joy of joys, free local and national calls.

Warkworth House (☎ 363682; www.warkworthhouse.co.uk; Warkworth Tce; s/d/f from £45/65/85; 🚭) Behind the blonde-brick façade and flower-flanked front steps of this Victorian terraced house, just off Parkside, is a long-established and much-loved guesthouse that retains period fireplaces, creaky wooden floors, bay windows and a pleasant patio. The comfy rooms have modern pastel-coloured furnishings, and children are welcome.

Arundel House Hotel (☎ 367701; www.arundelhousehotels.co.uk; 53 Chesterton Rd; s/d/f from £75/95/120; 🅿 🚭) Late-19th-century decorum meets bland 1990s hotel style in this handsome Victorian terraced building overlooking the Cam, with 103 uniformly pink-chintz rooms. Other than comfort, the biggest plus is pleasant views across the water and Jesus Green to central Cambridge – a short and extremely pleasant walk away.

TOP END

Cambridge Garden House (Moat House; ☎ 259988; www.moathousehotels.com; Granta Pl, Mill Lane; s/d from £134/144; 🅿 🚭 ❄ 💻 🏊 ♿) Bagging an enviable riverside spot in the city's heart, the interior of this resort-style hotel far surpasses expectations formed by its ugly modern shell. Design-mag perfect rooms are decorated with suede, leather, dark wood and boldly striped carpets, and even the bathrooms scream style. Best of all are the river-facing pool and the waterside gardens from which to watch punters glide past.

De Vere University Arms Hotel (☎ 351241; www.devere.co.uk; Regent St; d incl breakfast from £159; 🅿 🚭 ❄ 💻 ♿) Cambridge's most distinguished hotel, this huge early-Victorian pile hunkers down beside bustling Parker's Piece as though fondly overseeing his great-great-grandchildren. Its public spaces ooze gentleman's-club atmosphere, its 120 rooms comfort and elegance. Look out for the enormous, creaky cage lift from 1927. Parking costs £10.

Eating

BUDGET

Fitzbillies (☎ 352500; www.fitzbillies.com; 52 Trumpington St; 🕑 shop 9am-5.30pm, restaurant 9am-9.30pm) Cambridge's oldest bakery, beloved by generations of students for its ultra-sticky buns and quaint wood shopfront, also has a classy music-free restaurant dotted with fresh flowers for a tranquil cream tea or meals.

Tatties (☎ 323399; 11 Sussex St; mains £2-6; 🕑 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Fast-in, fast-out fishtank-style café and budget favourite that whips out baked and stuffed potatoes with innumerable fillings at lightening pace, as well as breakfasts, baguettes, salads and cakes. It gets very busy over lunch.

Clowns (☎ 355711; 54 King St; sandwiches from £2.75; 🕑 8am-midnight) Decorated with children's daubings of clowns, this is a thoroughly laid-back and charmingly personal spot for reading the newspaper, chatting over cappuccino, reasonably priced pasta or gelato, and relaxing on the roof terrace.

our pick **Michaelhouse** (☎ 309167; Trinity St; mains £3.50-6; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) You can sup Fairtrade coffee and nibble focaccia among soaring medieval arches or else take a pew within reach of the altar at this stylishly converted church, which still has a working chancel. The simple lunch menu is mostly vegetarian but also offers wine and beer for when God's back is turned.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

our pick **Rainbow Vegetarian Bistro** (☎ 321551; 9a King's Pde; mains £8-9; 🕑 10am-10pm Tue-Sat) First-rate vegetarian food and a pious glow emanate from this snug subterranean gem, accessed down a narrow passageway off King's Pde. It's decorated in funky colours and serves up organic dishes with a hint of the exotic, such as scrumptious Latvian potato bake and Indonesian gado gado.

Midsummer House (☎ 369299; www.midsummerhouse.co.uk; set lunch £20, 3-course dinner £55; 🕑 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Cambridge's gastronomic big-hitter, with two Michelin stars to its credit, this sophisticated restaurant is in a lovely grey-brick Victorian villa backing onto the river from its namesake common. Its adventurous French Mediterranean menu sends serious foodies weak at the knees. Book well ahead.

Twenty-Two (☎ 351880; www.restaurant22.co.uk; 22 Chesterton Rd; set dinner £24.50; 🕑 7-9.45pm Tue-Sat) Discretely disguised amid a row of Victorian terraced housing is this outstanding restaurant, blessed by both its romantic candlelit ambience and its wonderful gourmet British and European menu with a commitment to local produce.

Drinking

Punting and drinking are two of Cambridge students' favourite pastimes, and put the two together and you can really hit the relaxation jackpot or else end up quite literally drinking like a fish. The punting pubs, where rowers hang out and tourists can rent punts, are the best spots to join in the fun.

Eagle (☎ 505020; Bene't St) Cambridge's most famous pub has loosened the tongues and pickled the grey cells of many an illustrious academic in its day; among them Nobel Prize–winning scientists Crick and Watson, who are thought to have discovered the form of DNA. It's a traditional 16th-century pub with five cluttered cosy rooms, the back one popular with WWII airmen, who left their signatures on the ceiling.

Fort St George (☎ 354327; Midsummer Common) The ideal English summertime pub sandwiched between the grassy expanse of Midsummer Common and the punt-littered River Cam, and with lots of outdoor picnic tables at which to install yourself. Dating from the 16th century, the fort is said to be the oldest pub on the river, and has a snug, crookedly beamed interior to decamp when the sun's gone in.

St Radegund (☎ 311794; 127 King St; 🕑 5-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat & Sun) A quirky little one-off pub – the smallest in town – run by an endearing eccentric and pulling a superb selection of unusual real ales, St Radegund is hidden behind a bluff exterior and sackcloth curtains; the interior is hung with paraffin lamps and the ceiling burnt with graffiti.

Granta (☎ 505016; Newnham Rd) If the exterior of this picturesque waterside pub overhanging a pretty mill pond looks strangely familiar, it could be because it's the darling of many a television director. Its terrace sits directly beside the water and when your Dutch courage has been sufficiently fuelled, there are punts for hire alongside.

Entertainment

Pick up a *What's On* events guide from the tourist office or log on to www.cam.ac.uk/whatson.

NIGHTCLUBS

Fez (☎ 519224; www.cambridgefez.com; 15 Market Passage; admission £5-7; 🕑 8pm-2am Mon-Sat) The city's top club, popular with town and gown ever since the stone age, Moroccan-themed Fez plays everything from hip-hop to Latin funk and scores the cream of visiting DJs. Come early or expect queues.

Po Na Na Souk Bar (☎ 323880; www.ponana.co.uk; 7b Jesus Lane; 🕑 8pm-midnight) Sipping your cocktail in the intimate atmosphere of a Moroccan kasbah and nodding along to an eclectic mix of Latin, house and hip-hop music, it's easy to understand why this late-night bar has remained a local favourite for a decade. Monday is hip-twisting salsa night.

Twentytwo (☎ 324600; www.twentytwo-cambridge.co.uk; Hobson's Passage, Sidney St; admission £5; 🕑 10pm-2am) Tucked down a tight passageway is this funky club kitted out in '70s décor with hallucinogenic carpets and baby-blue/pink backlights and playing mostly mainstream choons. On Tuesday nights it hosts the city's best-loved gay and lesbian night.

THEATRE

Corn Exchange (☎ 357851; www.cornex.co.uk; Wheeler St) This colossal ex-market building near the tourist office is the city's main centre for arts and entertainment, attracting the top names in pop and rock to ballet.

Arts Theatre (☎ 503333; www.cambridgeartstheatre.com; 6 St Edward's Passage) Cambridge's biggest bona fide theatre puts on everything from pantomime to drama fresh from London's West End.

ADC (☎ 300085; www.adctheatre.com; Park St) Students' theatre and current home to the university's Footlights comedy troupe, which jump-started the careers of scores of England's comedy legends, including John Cleese and Peter Cook.

Getting There & Away

Cambridge is well served by trains, though not so well by bus. Trains run at least every 30 minutes from London's King's Cross and Liverpool St stations (£17.90, 45 minutes to 1¼ hours). There are also three trains per hour to Ely (15 minutes) and hourly connections to Bury St Edmunds (£7.50, 44 minutes) and King's Lynn (£9.30, 48 minutes).

From Drummer St bus station there are hourly buses to Stansted airport (£9.70, 55 minutes), Heathrow (£25, 2½ up to 3¼ hours) and Gatwick (£29, 3¾ hours) airports while a Luton service (£12.20, 1½ hours) runs every two hours.

Buses to Oxford (£6, 3¼ hours) are regular but take a very convoluted route.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

There are few more bike-friendly cities than Cambridge, and joining the ranks of students on their mad dashes to lectures or leisurely rides around town is an experience in itself. No mountain bikes necessary here; most places rent three-speeds.

Cambridge Station Cycles (☎ 307125; www.stationcycles.co.uk; Station Bldg, Station Rd; per half-day/day/week £6/8/16) Handily positioned by the station; free map provided.

City Cycle Hire (☎ 365629; www.citycyclehire.com; 61 Newnham Rd; per hour/half-day/day/week from £3/5/8/15)

Mike's Bikes (☎ 312591; 28 Mill Rd; per week/month £12/35) Only long-term rentals.

BUS

A free gas-powered City Shuttle runs around the centre stopping at Emmanuel St every 15 minutes. Four bus lines run around town from Drummer St bus station, including bus 3 from the train station to the town centre. Dayrider passes (£2.70) offer unlimited travel on all buses within Cambridge for one day; Megarider passes (£9.50) are valid for one week. Buy them on board.

WORTH THE TRIP

An adorable 16th-century thatched pink cottage in the country, the **Pink Geranium** (☎ 01763-260215; www.pinkgeranium.co.uk; Station Rd, Melbourn; mains £18-27; ⏰ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) is the kind of place you wish you'd brought your tweeds and wellies, and fasted for a week in preparation. Rumoured to have been Prince Charles' favourite when studying at Cambridge, 10 miles north, it's now a multi-award-winning restaurant and the archetypal English country getaway, surrounded by neatly snipped gardens, and full of cosy lounges and toned-down chintz.

CAR

Cambridge's centre is largely pedestrianised. It's best to use the well-signposted Park & Ride car parks (£1.40 to £1.80) on the outskirts of town. Shuttle buses run to the centre every 10 minutes between 7am and 7pm daily, then twice-hourly until 10pm.

TAXI

Contact **A1 Cabco** (☎ 312444) or **Panther** (☎ 715715) for a taxi.

AROUND CAMBRIDGE

Grantchester

Punting, strolling or cycling along the river or through dreamy flower-speckled meadows to this too-cute-to-be-true riverside village of thatched cottages, cosy pubs and chocolate-box pretty gardens is a Cambridge tradition going back over a century.

And once here, it's an absolute joy to flop into a deck chair shaded by apple trees and wolf down cream teas and calorific cakes at the quintessentially English **our pick** **Orchard tea garden** (☎ 01223-845788; www.orchard-grantchester.com; Mill Way; ⏰ approx 9.30am-5.30pm), favourite haunt of the Bloomsbury Group and other cultural icons.

Or to indulge in a post-punt pint, the **Red Lion** (High St) is a lovely pub near the river, with plenty of nooks and crannies to squirrel yourself away in.

Grantchester is 3 miles southeast of Cambridge on the River Granta.

American War Cemetery

Glenn Miller, Joseph Kennedy and 3809 more American servicemen who lost their lives in battle while based in Britain are commemorated at this moving **cemetery** (☎ 01954-210350; www.abmc.gov/ca.htm; Madingley; ⏰ 8am-5.30pm mid-Apr–Sep, 8am-5pm Oct–mid-Apr), 4 miles west of the city. You can visit the cemetery as part of a City Sightseeing tour (see p465).

Imperial War Museum

The romance of the winged war machine is alive and well at Europe's biggest **aviation museum** (☎ 835000; www.iwm.org.uk; adult/under 16yr £13/free; ⏰ 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Sep, 10am-4pm Oct–mid-Mar) in Duxford, 9 miles south of Cambridge by the motorway. Almost 200 lovingly waxed aircraft from dive bombers to biplanes, Spitfire to Concorde are housed on this vast airfield, over which grown men scurry as though they just pulled their noses from boyhood *Biggles* books.

This airfield was no idle choice for the museum: it was a frontline fighter station in WWII, and played a crucial role in the pivotal Battle of Britain. It was the home of the famous Dam Buster squadron of Lancasters, and today is home to the Royal Air Force's Red Arrows squadron, which performs all kinds of celestial trickery at airshows throughout the world.

Also included is the stunning **American Air Museum** hangar, designed by Norman Foster, which has the largest collection of American civil and military aircraft outside the USA. Look out for the flying fortress *Memphis Belle,* which flew from here. The museum's legendary **airshows** of modern and vintage planes are some of the best you'll ever see (see the website for dates) and battlefield scenes are displayed in the land warfare hall, where you can check out WWII tanks and artillery. Kids will enjoy the adventure playground and the flight simulator. And a swanky new AirSpace hangar is also set to open in 2007.

From Monday to Saturday, Stagecoach bus C7 runs to Duxford (45 minutes) from Cambridge Drummer St bus station, via the train station, every 20 minutes until approximately 6pm; show your bus ticket and you'll get a reduced admission rate into the museum. On Sundays and Bank Holidays, Myalls runs services every two hours from 11am to about 5.25pm.

ELY

☎ 01353 / pop 15,102

An easy and rewarding day trip from Cambridge, Ely (ee-lee) is a charming and historic city-town with a dazzling cathedral, scrupulously tidy Georgian and medieval centre and pretty riverside walks running out into the eerie fens around it. It's a thriving place, and while it used to be something of a joke that such a diminutive town could technically rank as a city, these days it's one of the fastest-growing cities in Europe. The odd name harks back to the days when Ely was an island marooned amid the undrained fens, which were inhabited by an abundance of eels that still make it into local cooking pots today.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 662062; tic@eastcambs.gov.uk; 29 St Mary's St; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) makes accommodation bookings and has maps, and dishes out leaflets on the town's 'Eel Trail' walking tour, studded by modern works of art. Ask here about guided walking tours, including ghostly night-time tours. Banks and ATMs can be found along High St.

Sights

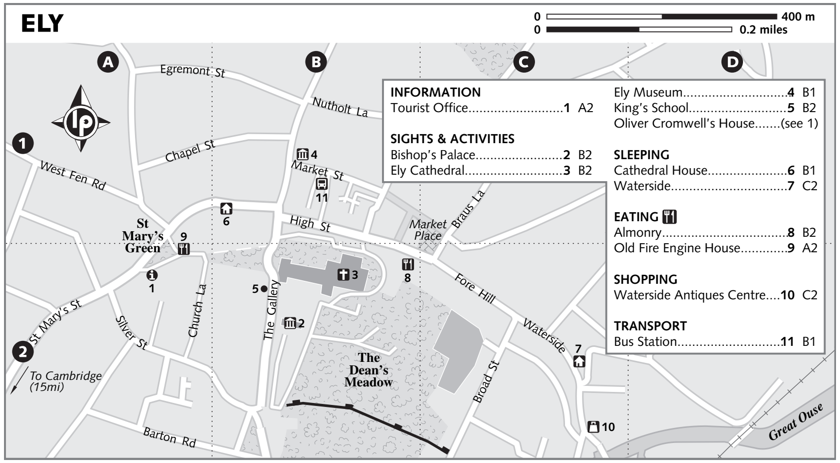
ELY CATHEDRAL

Not only dominating the town but visible across the flat fenland for vast distances, the ghostly silhouette of **Ely Cathedral** (☎ 667735; www.cathedral.ely.anglican.org; adult/child/concession £5.20/free/4.50; ⏰ 7am-7pm Easter-Aug, 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-5pm Sun Sep-Easter) is locally dubbed the 'Ship of the Fens'.

Walking into the early-12th-century Romanesque nave, you're immediately struck by its clean, uncluttered lines and lofty sense of space. The cathedral is renowned for its entrancing ceilings and the masterly 14th-century octagon and lantern tower, which soar upwards in shimmering colours that are well worthy of a crick in your neck for gazing at them.

The vast 14th-century Lady Chapel is the biggest in England; it's filled with eerily empty niches that once held statues of saints and martyrs. They were hacked out unceremoniously by iconoclasts during the English Civil War. However, the astonishingly delicate tracery and carving remain.

Ely Cathedral was a centre of pilgrimage for many centuries thanks to the 7th-century queen of Northumbria, Etheldreda, who founded an



abbey here in 673. A colourful character, Ethel shrugged off the fact she had been twice married in her determination to become a nun. She was canonised shortly after her death.

There are free guided tours of the cathedral, and an octagon and roof tour (£8 including admission).

Near the entrance there's a small but gleaming **stained-glass museum** (☎ 665025; www.stainedglassmuseum.com; adult/child £3.50/2.50) that lets you get eye to eye with saints, misshapen monsters and all manner of domestic barbarity through vivid glasswork from the 14th century onwards.

To lap up a good singsong in splendid surroundings, Choral Sunday service is at 10.30am and evensong is at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday, 3.45pm on Sunday.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Historic sites cluster about the cathedral's toes. Within spitting distance of the tower are both the former **Bishop's Palace**, now used as a nursing home, and **King's School**, which keeps the cathedral supplied with fresh-faced choristers.

A short hop across St Mary's Green is the attractive half-timbered **Oliver Cromwell's House** (☎ 662062; adult/child £3.95/2.70; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar), where England's warty warmonger lived with his family from 1636 to 1646, when he was the tithe collector of Ely. The house now has Civil War exhibits, portraits and waxworks and echoes with canned commentaries of – among other things – the great man's grisly death, exhumation and posthumous decapitation.

More town history can be explored in **Ely Museum** (☎ 666655; www.elymuseum.org.uk; adult/child £3/free; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun May-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr), which is housed in the Old Gaol House complete with prisoners' cells and their scrawled graffiti.

Ely is also a great place for rummaging through antiques, and signs lead down to the river and bargain-hunting heaven **Waterside Antiques Centre** (☎ 667066; The Wharf; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun). From here, charming riverside ambles flank the **Great Ouse**, which brims with activity, from Olympic rowers and riverboats to swans and hungry ducks. The towpath winds up- and downstream: for a quiet walk, turn left; turn right for the pub and tea garden. If you continue along this path you'll see the Fens stretching to the horizon.

Sleeping

our pick **Cathedral House** (☎ 662124; www.cathedralhouse.co.uk; 17 St Mary's St; s/d £45/75; 🅿 ⊠) Plenty of love has gone into the restoration of this gorgeous Georgian house, which is chock-a-block with fascinating antiques and curios. The individually decorated rooms are graced by original and period features, even in the bathrooms. Add to this a walled garden, converted stables and a central position and you're set.

Waterside (☎ 614329; www.29waterside.org.uk; 29 Waterside; d £60; ⊠) This pocket-sized B&B is in a wonderfully character-rich 18th-century oak-beamed and wooden-floored building near the waterfront. It's furnished with reclaimed pine and has a cute walled garden.

Eating

Slippery eels are still a local delicacy dished up in several of the restaurants in Ely.

Almonry (☎ 666360; High St; snacks £1.50-4, lunch £7-9; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Vying for the best setting award, this traditional teashop cosies up to the cathedral, spilling out into attractive gardens left of the Lady Chapel. Alternatively, you can shelter in its atmospheric 12th-century vaulted undercroft. Meals here are simple, but there's a also a wide range of caffeinated pick-me-ups.

Old Fire Engine House (☎ 662582; St Mary's St; mains about £15.50; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm & 7.30pm-9pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5.30pm Sun) Dining at this delightfully homespun restaurant and art gallery feels like eating at a friend's. Backed by beautiful gardens and housing various intimate nooks, it serves classic seasonal and local dishes (with refills on request) and its afternoon cream teas are excellent.

Getting There & Away

Ely is on the A10, 15 miles northeast of Cambridge. Following the Fen Rivers Way (map available from tourist offices), it's a lovely 17-mile towpath walk.

Buses 19 and X12 run every hour from Cambridge's Drummer St bus station (one hour), or in Ely from the bus stop on Market St. Trains are much quicker and more frequent (15 minutes, every 20 minutes). There are also twice-hourly trains to Peterborough (£7.40, 35 minutes) and Norwich (£12.20, 55 minutes), and hourly services to King's Lynn (£5.60, 30 minutes).

PETERBOROUGH

☎ 01733 / pop 156,061

The sprawling, shopping-mad city of Peterborough is home to a remarkable cathedral that alone justifies it as a day-tripper's destination from Cambridge or London. And while the city's high-gloss shopping malls are unlikely to quicken the pulse of visitors, they do inject a lively buzz into its streets. A scattering of other mildly interesting attractions beef up the town's credentials, but really, see the cathedral and you can leave happy.

Peterborough's bus and train stations are an easy walk west of the city centre. The **tourist office** (☎ 452336; www.visitpeterborough.com; 3-5 Minster Precincts; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-5pm Tue, 10am-4pm Sat) is in front of the cathedral's west front, and has information on guided walking and ghost tours (adult/child £4/2). It also has information on other attractions in the vicinity, including a steam railway and reconstructed Bronze Age roundhouses at Flag Fen.

Peterborough Cathedral

England may be filled with fine cathedrals boasting ostentatious façades, but few can rival the instant 'wow' factor of Peterborough's unique early-13th-century western front, with its three deep yawning arches and arrow-sharp crests.

Visitors enter the **cathedral** (☎ 355300; www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk; requested donation £3; 🕑 9am-5.15pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), which was founded in 1118, through an odd 14th-century porch that peeks out between the cavernous arches like a dog from its kennel. Inside, you'll be immediately struck by the height of the magnificent three-storeyed Norman nave and by its lightness, created by the mellow local stone and fine clerestory windows. The nave is topped by a breathtaking early-13th-century painted-timber ceiling that is one of the earliest and most important of its kind in Europe, and still sports much of its original diamond-patterned paintwork.

Press on below the Gothic tower, which was painstakingly reconstructed in the 19th century, to the northern choir aisle and you'll find the rather plain tombstone of Henry VIII's first wife, the tragic Catherine of Aragon, buried here in 1536. Her divorce, engineered by the king because she could not produce a male heir, led to the Reformation in England. Her only child (a daughter) was not even allowed to attend her funeral. Every 29 January there is a procession in the cathedral to commemorate her death.

Just beyond this is the cathedral's wonderful 15th-century eastern tip, which has superb fan vaulting thought to be the work of master mason John Wastell, who worked on King's College Chapel in Cambridge.

Loop around into the southern aisle, and you'll find gold lettering marking the spot where the ill-fated Mary Queen of Scots was once buried. On the accession of her son, James, to the throne, her body was moved to Westminster Abbey.

Getting There & Away

There are regular trains to London (£22.30, 50 minutes to 1¼ hours), Cambridge (£11.90, 48 minutes) and Ely (£7.40, 35 minutes).

SUFFOLK

You have to pinch yourself to remember that this charming rural backwater of England was once an astonishingly rich place that amassed great wool wealth and operated a string of busy ports. However, its gentle hills and lush valleys are filled with reminders of its golden age, from the magnificent 'wool churches' (as in paid for by, not made of) that dot the landscape, to the lavish pargeting (decorative stucco plasterwork) that adorns its buildings. The Stour Valley particularly delights with villages that seem freeze-dried since the Middle Ages, Bury St Edmunds impresses with both its mighty past and lively present, while the coast is strung with pretty and poignant seaside resorts increasingly nibbled by the sea.

Information

You can whet your appetite for the region further through the websites www.visitsuffolkattractions.co.uk and www.visit-suffolk.org.uk.

Getting Around

Consult **Suffolk County Tourism** (www.suffolkonboard.com) or **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelineeastanglia.co.uk) for local transport information.

IPSWICH

☎ 01473 / pop 117,069

Suffolk's county capital was one of the very first Saxon towns in England, a thriving medieval centre of commerce and a major point of emigration to America. But while heavy investment jazzes up its lively waterfront marinas, in its centre beautiful timber-framed buildings moulder behind scruffy boards and ugly modern chain stores nudge medieval churches. The most beautifully preserved buildings, of which there are several humdingers, are occupied by private enterprises. That said, the town has some beautiful parkland, a burgeoning cultural scene and great transport connections.

Information & Orientation

The **tourist office** (☎ 258070; www.visit-ipswich.com; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in 15th-century St Stephen's Church, off St Stephen's Lane. It organises 90-minute guided **tours** (adult/child £2.50/2; 🕒 May-Sep) at 2.15pm Tuesday and Thursday. In summer there are also walks on Saturday at 11am.

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

For self-catering country cottages in the area, have a browse through these sites:

Farm Stay Anglia (www.farmstayanglia.co.uk)
Holiday Cottages Cambridge (www.holidaycottagescambridge.co.uk)
Just Suffolk (www.justsuffolk.com)
Lincolnshire Cottages (www.lincolnshirecottages.com)
Suffolk Secrets (www.suffolk-secrets.co.uk)

The train station is a 15-minute walk southwest of the tourist office along Princes St and across the roundabout.

Ipswich doesn't especially deserve an overnight stay, but contact the tourist office if you need accommodation.

Sights

A glorious wedding-cake façade of crisp sugary-white pargeting decorates the front of the 17th-century **Ancient House** (☎ 214144; 40 Buttermarket; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), its four panels each representing the continents discovered at the time. It's one of the finest examples of the craft you'll see anywhere and crawls with mythological creatures and characters. The building now houses a kitchen outfitters, but you can take a peek at the hammer-beam roof inside. The house is about 50m north of the tourist office.

Set in a lovely rolling park 300m north of town, the multigabled 16th-century **Christchurch Mansion** (☎ 433554; Soane St; admission free; 🕒 mansion & gallery 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-4.30pm Sun, closes at dusk in winter) is filled with period furniture and works by the likes of Constable and Gainsborough. Outside, look for the statue of a delightfully cantankerous granny – immediately recognisable to Britons as being the creation of local comic-strip artist Giles.

Less exciting are the dusty stuffed-and-mounted displays at **Ipswich Museum** (☎ 433551; High St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), with exhibits from natural history to Anglo-Saxon Ipswich.

Ipswich Buses (☎ 0800 919 390; www.ipswichbuses.co.uk) runs one-hour city sightseeing buses from April to August.

Getting There & Away

There are trains every 20 minutes to London's Liverpool St station (£26.80, 1¼ hours), twice hourly to Norwich (£10.90, 45 minutes) and Bury St Edmunds (£6, 30 to 40 minutes). There are bus services roughly every half-hour to Sudbury Monday to Saturday and less frequently on Sunday.

AROUND IPSWICH

Sutton Hoo

Soon after the world was consumed by Tutankhamen fever, England was to discover its own ancient treasure-trove. It was right here on this rather lonely rural spot that in 1939 archaeologists uncovered the hull of an enormous Anglo-Saxon ship, in which a king-like individual was interred with a fabulous wealth of Saxon riches. It's thought that this may be the burial site of Raedwald, King of East Anglia.

His exquisitely crafted helmet is now the site's symbol, and you can see a fine replica in the **visitors centre** (NT; ☎ 01394-389714; www.suttonhoo.org; Woodbridge; adult/child £5.50/2.50, discounts for those arriving on foot or bicycle; 🕒 11am-5pm daily Jul-early Sep, 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Easter–mid-April & early Sep-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Easter) along with many of the original finds and a full-scale reconstruction of his ship and burial chamber. The finest treasures, including a warrior's helmet and shield, gold ornaments and Byzantine silver, are displayed in London's British Museum (p139).

There's little other than pimpled burial mounds to see at the site itself, although you may still get an attack of the heebie-jeebies recalling that they were also used as a place of execution. For a better appreciation you can always join one of the enlightening one-hour tours (adult/child £2.50/1.50).

Sutton Hoo is 2 miles east of Woodbridge and 6 miles northeast of Ipswich. Bus 73, 71 and 171 together visit Sutton Hoo 10 times per day Monday to Saturday, passing through Woodbridge (10 minutes) en route to Ipswich (40 minutes).

Seckford Hall (☎ 01394-385678; www.seckford.co.uk; Woodbridge; s/d from £85/130; 🅿 💻 🏊 ♿) is one of the best places to stay in the area. It's a commanding 16th-century Elizabethan country mansion just outside Woodbridge with luxuriously appointed rooms, oodles of antiques, a terrific restaurant and an 18-hole golf course next door.

STOUR VALLEY

The River Stour trickles gently through a soft, pastoral landscape that has inspired some of Britain's best-loved painters from Constable to Gainsborough. Its impossibly pretty villages are filled with the timber-framed houses and elegant churches that recall the region's 15th-century weaving boom, when this unlikely valley produced more cloth than anywhere else in England. In the 16th century, however, production gradually shifted elsewhere and the valley reverted to a rural backwater, ignored by the Industrial Revolution and virtually everyone else – bad news for locals, but great for today's visitors as its medieval villages have survived miraculously intact.

Long Melford

☎ 01787 / pop 3675

For such a small and stringy village, self-important Long Melford has a lot to boast of. For starters there are its two fine stately homes and a 2-mile High St that claims to be the longest in England, not to mention the stunning timber-framed buildings and antique shops that line it. Here too is a magnificent church, which presides over a sprawling village green that's totally disproportionate to the village's size.

From outside, the romantic Elizabethan mansion of **Melford Hall** (NT; ☎ 376395; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 1.30-5pm Wed-Sun May-Sep, 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) seems little changed since it entertained the Queen in 1578. Inside, you can imagine her being fussed over in the panelled banqueting hall. There's also much Regency and Victorian finery and a display on Beatrix Potter, who was related the Parker family that owned the house from 1786 to 1960.

There's a noticeably different atmosphere at Long Melford's other red-brick Elizabethan mansion, just up the road and down a tree-lined avenue. **Kentwell Hall** (☎ 310207; www.kentwell.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/4.75, admission varies on event days; 🕒 noon-5pm Apr-Sep) is a private home with a wonderfully lived-in feel despite being as full of centuries-old ghost stories and as much Tudor pomp as you could hope for. It's surrounded by a rectangular moat and there's a Tudor-rose maze and a rare-breeds farm that'll keep the kids happy. Kentwell bristles with bodices and hose from mid-June to mid-July, when several hundred Tudor enthusiasts don traditional attire and re-create a year in the Tudor calendar.

The magnificently pompous **Great Church of the Holy Trinity** (☎ 281836; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Mar & Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Feb) nearby is a very stately affair, well worth sticking a nose into if only for its stained-glass windows.

SLEEPING & EATING

Denmark House (☎ 378798; www.denmarkhousebb.co.uk; Hall St; s/d £33/55; ☒) Situated in the village's heart, this modest-fronted little town-house B&B is a Grade II–listed building with a long history, and parts dating back to medieval times. It has cosy beamed rooms with décor your granny would just love.

Black Lion Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 312356; www.blacklionhotel.net; the Green; s/d from £88/120) A gorgeous little 10-room hotel on the village green, the 17th-century Black Lion has individually styled rooms, some with period style and romantic four-posters and some altogether more quirky, such as the zebra-striped family room. It also has a superb restaurant (set menu £28).

Scutcher's Bistro (☎ 310200; www.scutchers.com; Westgate St; mains £14-19; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Renowned throughout the Stour Valley for its exquisite menu of classic and more contemporary British dishes, Scutcher's nonetheless has a wonderfully unpretentious bistro feel, cheerfully painted and wood-beamed. It's just west of the Black Lion.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses leave from the High St outside the post office. There are hourly services Monday to Saturday to Bury St Edmunds (52 minutes) calling at Sudbury (10 minutes). More services also shuttle back and forth to Sudbury (10 minutes) twice hourly during the week.

Lavenham

☎ 01787 / pop 1738

There's barely a straight line in the whole of topsy-turvy Lavenham, Eastern England's loveliest medieval wool town. Crammed into its centre are around 300 exquisitely preserved buildings that lean and lurch like old folks balancing their old wooden bones against each other. Lavenham reached its peak in the heady 15th-century wool wealth days, after which the town quietly fossilised. So modern-day visitors are treated to a remarkably complete medieval town where pretty, pink thatched cottages rub shoulders with timber-framed and pargeted houses that now house curiosity shops, art galleries, quaint tearooms and ancient inns.

The **tourist office** (☎ 248207; lavenhamtic@babergh.gov.uk; Lady St; 🕒 10am-4.45pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Mar & Nov) offers guided walks (£3.25) around the village departing at 2.30pm Saturday and 11am and 2.30pm Sunday.

SIGHTS

Many of Lavenham's most enchanting buildings cluster along High St, Water St and around Market Pl, which is dominated by the early-16th-century **guildhall** (NT; ☎ 247646; adult/child £3.50/1.50; 🕒 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Mar, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Dec), a superb example of a close-studded, timber-framed building and now a local history museum, with displays on the wool trade and weaving demonstrations on Thursdays.

Also on Market Pl, the atmospheric 14th-century **Little Hall** (☎ 247179; Market Pl; adult/child £2.50/free; 🕒 2-5.30pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Easter-Oct) is another gem, with soft ochre plastering, timber frame and crown-post roof. Once home to a successful wool merchant, it's now a private residence open to the public.

At the village's high southern end rises the soaring steeple of the medieval **Church of St Peter & St Paul** (🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 8.30am-3.30pm Oct-Mar), which is a further testament to Lavenham's past prosperity. Built between 1485 and 1525, it is approached by avenues of box hedges.

SLEEPING & EATING

Brett Farm (☎ 248533; www.brettfarm.com; off Water St; s/d £35/60; Ⓟ ☒) The budget-minded will do very well at this modern farmhouse bungalow, a very friendly, unpretentious place with on-site stables, and comfortable spotless rooms with wicker furniture and textured ceilings. It's a short, pleasant walk south of the village. Carriage and bike hire are available.

our pick **Lavenham Priory** (☎ 247404; www.lavenhampriory.co.uk; Water St; s/d from £75/95; Ⓟ ☒) A rare treat, this sumptuously restored 15th-century building was once home to Benedictine monks, then medieval cloth merchants, and still perfectly captures its Elizabethan spirit with cavernous fireplaces, leaded windows and exquisite period rooms. Now an upmarket six-room B&B, it must be booked well in advance.

Swan Hotel (☎ 247477; www.theswanatlavenham.co.uk; High St; d £105-235; Ⓟ ☒) A warren of stunning timber-framed 15th-century buildings now shelters one of the region's best-known hotels. Rooms are suitably spectacular affairs, some with immense fireplaces, colossal beams and magnificent four-posters. Elsewhere the hotel cultures a gentlefolk's country-club feel. The modern British restaurant in the lofty Great Hall has also won acclaim (set lunch/dinner £20/28.50).

Angel (☎ 247388; www.theangelhotel.com; Market Pl; mains £9-13; Ⓟ ☒) Eating is a deceptively informal affair at this lovely 15th-century inn, which actually serves award-winning modern British cuisine, with lip-smacking steak-and-ale pies the speciality of the house. The Angel also has beautifully appointed country-style rooms (single/double from £55/80).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Chambers Buses connects Lavenham with Bury St Edmunds (30 minutes) and Sudbury (20 minutes), with an hourly bus (until 6pm Monday to Saturday, no service on Sunday) from Bury St Edmunds to Colchester via Sudbury and Lavenham. There are no direct buses from Cambridge; you must go via Sudbury, also the location of the nearest train station.

BURY ST EDMUNDS

☎ 01284 / pop 36,218

A new buzz with an old message has settled over the genteel market town of Bury St Edmunds of late. Once home to one of the most powerful monasteries of medieval Europe, the town has just seen the completion of its fine cathedral with a new Gothic lantern tower – a mere 500 years after the present building was begun. However, Bury has long attracted travellers for its powerful history, atmospheric ruins, handsome Georgian architecture and bustling agricultural markets, still held at Angel Hill on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Others come to the town on a mission to investigate the other reason for its fame: beer. Greene King, the famous Suffolk brewer, is based here with its doors wide open to visitors.

History

Bury's slogan 'Shrine of a King, Cradle of the Law' recalls two defining events in its history. The town's namesake St Edmund was the last king of East Anglia, decapitated by the Danes in 855. The martyr's body was reburied here in 903, and began to trot out ghostly miracles from the grave. His shrine became a centre of pilgrimage and the core of a new Benedictine monastery. At its height the abbey was one of the most famous and wealthy in the country, at least until Henry VIII got his grubby hands on it in 1536, during the dissolution of the monasteries.

'Cradle of the Law' refers to how in 1214 the English barons drew up a petition that would form the basis of Magna Carta here in the abbey, thus setting the country on the road to a constitutional government.

Orientation & Information

Bury is easily navigated thanks to Abbot Baldwin's original 11th-century grid layout – one of the first in the country. The train station is 900m north of the tourist office, with frequent buses to the centre. The bus station is in the town's heart.

Bury's **tourist office** (☎ 764667; tic@stedsbc.gov.uk; 6 Angel Hill; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Nov-Easter) has maps and advice and is also the starting point for guided walking tours (£3) that depart at 2.30pm daily Easter to September. Audio tours (adult/child £2.50/1.50) of the abbey ruins are also available here.

Sights

ABBEY & PARK

Now a picturesque ruin residing in beautiful gardens behind the cathedral, the once all-powerful **abbey** (admission free; 🕒 dawn-dusk) still impresses despite the townspeople having made off with much of the stone, and St Edmund's grave and bones having disappeared long ago.

You enter the park via one of two well-preserved old gates: opposite the tourist office, the staunch mid-14th-century **Great Gate** is intricately decorated but nevertheless ominously defensive, complete with battlements, portcullis and arrow slits. The other entrance sits further up along Angel Hill, where a gargoyle-studded early-12th-century **Norman Tower** looms beside the cathedral.

Just beyond the Great Gate is a peaceful garden where the **Great Court** was once a hive of activity. Just beyond is a dovecote that marks the only remains of the **Abbot's Palace**. The best-conserved remains of this once mighty abbey church are part of the western front and **Samson Tower**, which were borrowed by houses built into them. In front of Samson Tower is a beautiful **statue of St Edmund** by Dame Elisabeth Frink (1976). The rest of the abbey spreads eastward like a ragged skeleton, with various lumps and pillars hinting at its immense size. Just north of the church lie more clustered remains of **monastic buildings**.

ST EDMUNDSBURY CATHEDRAL

Completed in 2005, the 45m-high Millennium Tower of **St Edmundsbury Cathedral** (St James; ☎ 754933; www.stedscathedral.co.uk; requested donation £3; 🕒 7.30am-6pm) is a vision in virginal Lincolnshire limestone, and its traditional Gothic-style construction gives a good idea of how the towers of many other English cathedrals must once have looked fresh from the stonemason's chisel.

Most of the rest of the building dates from the early 16th century, though the eastern end is postwar 20th-century, and the northern side was completed in 1990. It began life as a church and was only made a cathedral in 1914.

The overall effect is light and lofty, with a gorgeous hammer-beam roof and a striking sculpture of the crucified Christ by Dame Elisabeth Frink in the north transept. The impressive entrance porch has a tangible Spanish influence, a tribute to Abbot Anselm (1121–48), who opted against pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in favour of building a church dedicated to St James (Santiago in Spanish) right here.

ST MARY'S CHURCH

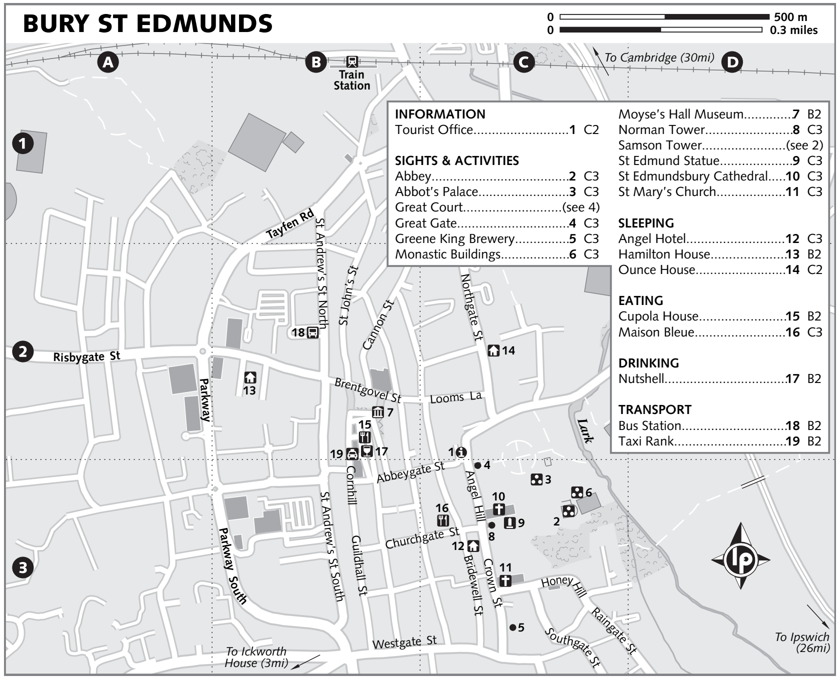
One of the biggest parish churches in the country, **St Mary's** contains the tomb of Mary Tudor (Henry VIII's sister and a one-time queen of France). Built around 1430, it also has a host of somewhat vampirish angels swooping from its roof, and a bell is still rung to mark curfew, as it was in the Middle Ages.

GREENE KING BREWERY

Churning out some of Britain's favourite booze since Victorian times, this famous **brewery** (☎ 714297; www.greeneking.co.uk; Crown St; museum adult/child £2/1, day/evening tours £8/10; 🕒 museum 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun, tours noon & 3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am, 12.30pm & 3pm Sat, 11.30am Sun, 7pm Wed-Fri Easter-Sep) has a museum and runs tours, after which you can appreciate what all the fuss is about in their brewery tap bar. Tours are popular so book ahead.

MOYSE'S HALL MUSEUM

Moyse's Hall Museum (☎ 706183; Cornhill; adult/child £2.60/2.10; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) wows with its impressive 12th-century undercroft and tells some particularly gruesome stories in a room dedicated to death, burial and witchcraft. Among other curiosities, you'll discover a mummified cat that was purposefully buried alive in a building's walls, a book bound in the tanned skin of an infamous murderer, and an armour-like gibbet that once displayed executed criminals.



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Sleeping

Hamilton House (☎ 703022; terrywelsh821@btinternet.co.uk; 4 Nelson Rd; s/d/tr from £25/48/58; 🚭) This wonderfully friendly B&B is in an attractive red-brick Edwardian house with four large, cheerfully decorated rooms, nearby parking and a short walk from the town centre. Packed lunches can be arranged on request.

Ounce House (☎ 761779; www.ouncehouse.co.uk; Northgate St; s/d from £65/85; Ⓟ 🚭) There are only a few rooms up for grabs at this dignified Victorian merchant's house, which mixes a personable atmosphere with pristine country-style rooms and the kind of neat 19th-century interior that makes you sit up straight and mind your Ps and Qs at the breakfast table. Request a room overlooking the walled garden.

Angel Hotel (☎ 714000; www.theangel.co.uk; 3 Angel Hill; s/d from £125/135; Ⓟ 🚭 💻 ♿) Peeking from behind a shaggy mane of vines, this famous old coaching inn has hosted many a dignitary in its long history, including fictional celebrity Mr Pickwick, who Dickens wrote enjoyed an 'excellent roast dinner' here. And you can follow his example in the hotel's top-class restaurant (set dinner £25 to £40). Rooms are split between a slick contemporary wing and traditional Georgian building.

Eating

Maison Bleue (☎ 760623; www.maisonbleue.co.uk; 31 Churchgate St; mains £9-19, set lunch/dinner £14/24; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This superb seafood bistro is justly popular with locals for its imaginative preparations of salmon, skate, monkfish and more. It has crisp white-linen style, chic waiters and colourful marine murals.

Cupola House (☎ 765808; www.the-cupola.com; The Transverse; mains £16-20, bar food £6-8.50) This grand 17th-century apothecary's home, topped by a baroque-style octagonal cupola, is rich with historic features. It was recently rescued from a severe state of disrepair and now houses a stylish contemporary restaurant with a meaty menu and relaxed atmosphere.

Drinking

Nutshell (☎ 764867; The Traverse) Recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as Britain's smallest, this midget-sized timber-framed pub is an absolute gem and a tourist attraction in its own right. Mind how you knock back a pint here as in the crush you never know who you're going to elbow.

Getting There & Away

Centrally placed, Bury is a convenient point from which to explore western Suffolk. There are three daily National Express buses to London (£12.60, 2½ hours). From Cambridge, Stagecoach 11 runs to Bury (1¼ hours) hourly from Monday to Saturday; the last bus back to Cambridge leaves at 7.30pm.

Trains go to Ipswich (£6, 30 to 40 minutes, two per hour), Ely (£8, 30 minutes, six daily) and hourly to Cambridge (£7.50, 45 minutes), all of which have links to London (£30, two hours).

For taxis call **A1 Cars** (☎ 766777) or try the rank alongside the market.

AROUND BURY ST EDMUNDS

Ickworth House & Park

The puffed-up pomposity of stately home **Ickworth House** (NT; ☎ 735270; adult/child house & park £7/3, park only £3.40/90p; 🕒 house 1-5pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar–Oct, park 8am-8pm year-round) is palpable from the minute you catch sight of its immense oval rotunda and wide outspread wings. The building is the whimsical creation of fourth Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry Frederick Hervey (1730–1803; see the boxed text, p478), and contains fine paintings by Titian, Gainsborough and Velasquez. There's also a lovely Italian garden, parkland bearing the landscaping eye of Capability Brown, a deer enclosure and a hide to explore. You can even imagine yourself a houseguest of the nutty earl thanks to a swanky new **hotel** (☎ 735350; www.ickworthhotel.com; d £180-490; Ⓟ 🚭 💻 🏊) in the east wing.

Ickworth is 3 miles southwest of Bury on the A143. Burtons bus service 344/5 from Bury train station (15 minutes) to Haverhill can drop you nearby.

ALDEBURGH

☎ **01728 / pop 2790**

The adorable little fishing village of Aldeburgh paints a rosy picture of a traditional British seaside resort, with ramshackle fishing huts selling fresh-from-the-nets catch, fine restaurants serving the best fish and chips in the southeast, a sweeping shingle beach that is steadily encroaching into the town's heart, and a lively cultural scene.

THE ECCENTRIC EARL

The Hervey family had such a reputation for eccentricity that it was said of them that 'when God created the human race he made men, women and Herveys'. Perhaps the biggest weirdo of them all was the creator of Ickworth House, Frederick, the third son of the third Earl of Bristol. As Bishop of Derry (Ireland) he was renowned not for his piety but for his agnosticism, vanity and oddity: he would force his clergymen to race each other through peat bogs in the middle of the night, sprinkle flour on the floor of his house to catch night-time adulterers, champion the cause of Catholic emancipation (he was, after all, a Protestant bishop) and earn himself the sobriquet of 'wicked prelate' from George III.

Not content with his life in Ireland, in later years Frederick took to travelling around Europe, where he indulged each and every one of his passions: women, wine, art and intrigue. He tried to pass himself off as a spy in France, and for his trouble he was rewarded with a nine-month prison sentence in a Napoleonic gaol. While in Italy, he horrified visiting English aristocrats with his dress sense and manners; he often dressed in military garb and once chucked a bowl of pasta onto a religious procession because he hated the sound of tinkling bells.

Composer Benjamin Britten and lesser-known poet George Crabbe both lived and worked here; Britten founded East Anglia's primary arts and music festival, the **Aldeburgh Festival** (☎ 687110; www.aldeburgh.co.uk), which takes place in June and tops the grand old age of 60 in 2007. Britten's legacy is commemorated by Maggi Hambling's wonderful new *Scallop* sculpture, a short stroll left along the seashore. Its delicate, sometimes bird-like, sometimes fan-like interlocking shells invite clambering and crawling by holidaying kids who are only too quick to oblige.

Aldeburgh's other photogenic gem is the intricately carved and timber-framed **Moot Hall** (adult £1; 🕑 2.30-4pm May-Sep), which now sits warily beside the approaching seashore when once it sat plump in the town's centre.

Information can be found at the **tourist office** (☎ 453637; atic@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk; 152 High St; 🕑 9am-5.15pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter).

Walking

A great way to enjoy the bracing sea air is by following the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path, which passes just 1km north of Aldeburgh, up along the coast for a few miles. Alternatively, from Aldeburgh follow the path inland for a lovely 3-mile walk towards the village of Snape, through some pleasant wooded areas and fields.

Sleeping

Blaxhall YHA (☎ 0870 770 5702; blaxhall@yha.org.uk; Heath Walk; dm £11; 🅿) Housed in an old school building that gives it an extra-institutional aura, this hostel nonetheless has small, great-value dorms. It's situated in good walking, cycling and birding country 6 miles from Aldeburgh, and west of Snape Maltings.

Ocean House (☎ 452094; jbrereoh@aol.com; 25 Crag Path; s/d from £60/70, sea-facing r extra £5; 🚭) Plump in the middle of the town's shoreline, this cosy red-brick Victorian guesthouse has period décor and unimpeded sea views. Unexpected touches include crocheted bedspreads, a rocking horse, and the top-floor room even has a grand piano! Bikes can be borrowed and there's a table-tennis table in the cellar.

White Lion Hotel (☎ 452720; www.whitelion.co.uk; Market Cross Pl; s/d with sea view £90/156, without £78/132; 🅿 🚭) Aldeburgh's oldest hotel is a large, traditionally run place overlooking the shingle beach, simple fishing shacks and historic Moot Hall. The building retains some 16th-century features, especially in the excellent oak-panelled restaurant, but has mostly straight-laced modernish rooms.

Eating

Café 152 (☎ 454594; www.152aldeburgh.co.uk; 152 High St; mains £10-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Freshly netted seafood is always the dish of the day in this stylishly minimalist bistro, warmed by fresh flowers, simple wooden furniture and stripped-wood floors. The seasonal menu is delightfully creative, ranging from poached skate with vegetable ribbons to crisp anchovy fritter.

SOUTHWOLD

☎ 01502 / pop 3858

One of the very prettiest of Eastern England's seaside resorts, Southwold sits atop sturdy cliffs that have largely protected it from the fate of its increasingly subaquatic neighbours. Its reputation as a well-heeled holiday getaway has earned it the nickname 'Kensington-on-Sea' after the posh district of London, and its gorgeous sandy beach, pebble-walled cottages, cannon-dotted clifftop and rows of beachfront bathing huts are all undeniably picturesque. The occasional whiff of roasting malt is also a reminder that Southwold is home to the **Adnams Brewery** (☎ 727200; www.adnams.co.uk; Adnams Pl, Sole Bay Brewery), so what better excuse to try its creamy ales in one of the town's old coaching inns?

The **tourist office** (☎ 724729; www.visit-southwold.co.uk; 69 High St; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat Oct-Mar) can help out with accommodation and information.

Starting inland, the **Church of St Edmund** (Church St; admission free; 🕑 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, to 4pm rest of year) is worth a quick peek for its fabulous medieval screen and 15th-century bloodshot-eyed Jack-o-the-clock, which grumpily overlooks the church's rear. A mere stone's throw away is an old weavers' cottage that now houses the **Southwold Museum** (☎ 726097; www.southwoldmuseum.org; 9-11 Victoria St; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-noon & 2-4pm Aug, 2-4pm Apr-Oct), where you can gen up on the explosive 132-ship and 50,000-men Battle of Solebay (1672), fought between the English, French and Dutch fleets just off the coast.

But Southwold's shorefront is really the place to be. Take time to amble along its promenade, admire the squat 19th-century **lighthouse** before ending up at the cute little **pier** (☎ 722105; www.southwoldpier.co.uk), first built in 1899 but recently reconstructed. In among a few cheap-and-cheerful bars, fast-food dispensers and amusements, you'll find a quirky collection of handmade slot machines including a mobility masterclass for zimmerframe-users, and a modern water clock sculpture with a naughty secret revealed every half-hour.

Sleeping & Eating

Acton Lodge (☎ 723217; www.southwold.ws/actonlodge; 18 South Green; s/d £40/68; 🅿 🚭) This huge Victorian homestead with a Gothic-style tower sits beside a sprawling green that runs down to the seafront. It's peppered with antiques and has just three colourful rooms with either sea or green views. The Aga-cooked breakfasts are uncommonly healthy, with fish options.

Northcliffe Guest House (☎ 724074; www.northcliffe-southwold.co.uk; 20 North Pde; s/d £55/70; 🚭) This spacious three-storey Victorian terraced house sits snootily overlooking the sea and pier. It has courteous owners, tasteful décor and lovely rooms variously decorated in pastel shades.

Buchenham Coffee House (☎ 723273; 81 High St; mains £6.60; 🕑 lunch) Tucked away in a basement with low-beamed ceiling, exposed brick and art in the wall cavities, this café serves delicious vegetarian specials such as Tuscan bean crunch and vegetable moussaka.

Getting There & Away

Bus connections are surprisingly limited: your best bet is to catch one of the hourly services to Lowestoft (45 minutes) or Halesworth train station (30 minutes) and continue from there.

NORFOLK

There's an old saying that folks in Norfolk 'have one foot on the land, and one in the sea', although in truth there's a whole watery grey area in between. Seemingly spread by palette knife in a wide coastal arc, Norfolk is drizzled with inland waterways. The idyllic Norfolk Broads beckon for boating holidays. Bird-watchers flock to its marshy nature reserves, and the county's shingly coastline is a largely unspoilt crescent, fringed by pretty flint houses and boats hauling in fresh shellfish. And when you've had enough peace and quiet, you can always head for bustling county town, Norwich; in addition to castle, cathedral and medieval churches galore, it has the liveliest pubs, clubs and restaurants around.

Information

Some handy websites include:
Independent Traveller's Norfolk (www.itnorfolk.co.uk)
Norfolk Coast (www.norfolkcoast.co.uk)
Visit Norfolk (www.visitnorfolk.co.uk)
Visit West Norfolk (www.visitwestnorfolk.com)

Activities

Waymarked walking trails include the well-known **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** national trail (see p458). Other long-distance paths include the **Weavers Way**, a 57-mile trail from Cromer to Great Yarmouth, and the **Angles Way**, which negotiates the valleys of

NORFOLK, WHERE 'FOKES DEW DIFF'RUNT

Norfolk's inhabitants are duly proud of their reputation for bloody-mindedness. To quote a favourite local yarn, a new bishop arrived at his new diocese to be promptly warned by his predecessor that if he wanted to lead anyone here he should first find out where they were going and walk in front of them. It's often said that it was this doggedness that helped make the region a runaway commercial success in the Middle Ages. We'll let you decide for yourselves if the label still sticks.

the Rivers Waveney and Little Ouse for 70 miles. Meanwhile the **Wherryman's Way** (www.wherrymansway.net) is a newly launched 35-mile walking and cycling route through the Broads, following the River Yare from Norwich to Great Yarmouth.

For a real challenge, the **Around Norfolk Walk** is a 220-mile circuit that combines most of the above.

Getting Around

There's comprehensive travel advice and timetable information available at **Passenger Transport Norfolk** (www.passengertransport.norfolk.gov.uk) or you can call the national **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608).

NORWICH

☎ 01603 / pop 121,550

Once described as having a pub for every day of the year and a church for every Sunday, vibrant Norwich (pronounced norritch) still has both in abundance and plenty more besides. These days the fabulous medieval wool churches that crop up on almost every street corner house everything from cybercafés to a puppet theatre in a heart-warming demonstration of how preservation and innovation can go hand in hand. Choice modern developments and the city's artsy student population further ensure that its steep zigzagging warren of historic streets brim with activity. The city is home to a remarkable Norman keep and a marvellous cathedral, and while the city's economic clout has waned considerably since its medieval heyday, Norfolk's capital is still one of the region's most appealing cities after Cambridge.

History

Though Norwich's history stretches back well over a thousand years, the city's golden age was during the Middle Ages, when it was England's most important city besides London. Edward III encouraged Flemish weavers to settle here in the 14th century, and their arrival helped establish the wool industry that fattened the city and sustained it right through to the 18th century.

Mass immigration from the Low Countries peaked in the troubled 16th century. In 1579 more than a third of the town's citizens were foreigners of a staunch Protestant stock, which proved beneficial during the Civil War when the Protestant parliamentarians caused Norwich little strife.

Orientation

The castle crowns central Norwich, surrounded by a compact medieval street plan. Within the circle of river and city walls there are scattered more than 30 parish churches and the Anglican cathedral. At the city's heart is its candy-stripe canopied **market** (Market Sq; ⏰ approx 8am-4.30pm), one of the biggest and oldest markets in England, running since 1025. The enormous modern Forum building houses the tourist office.

Information

Banks and ATMs can be found around the Market Sq.

Boots (☎ 767970; 19 Castle Mall) Well-stocked pharmacy.

Library (☎ 774774; Forum; ⏰ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) Free internet for those with ID and the patience to fill out a few forms.

Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital (☎ 286286; Colney Lane) Four miles west of the centre.

Norwich Internet Café (All Saints Church, Westlegate; per 20min £1; ⏰ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun)

Post office (☎ 761635; 84-85 Castle Mall)

Tourist office (☎ 727927; www.visitnorwich.co.uk; ⏰ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Just inside the Forum on Millennium Plain.

Sights

NORWICH CASTLE MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

A solid sentinel overlooking medieval and modern Norwich from its hilltop perch, this massive Norman **castle keep** (☎ 493636; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; castle & museum adult/child £4.30/3.15, art gallery & exhibitions £4.30/3.15, all museum zones £6.30/4.60; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-May) – built in 1160 – ranks highly in the list of best-preserved examples of Anglo-Norman military architecture, despite a 19th-century face-lift and a gigantic shopping centre grafted to one side.

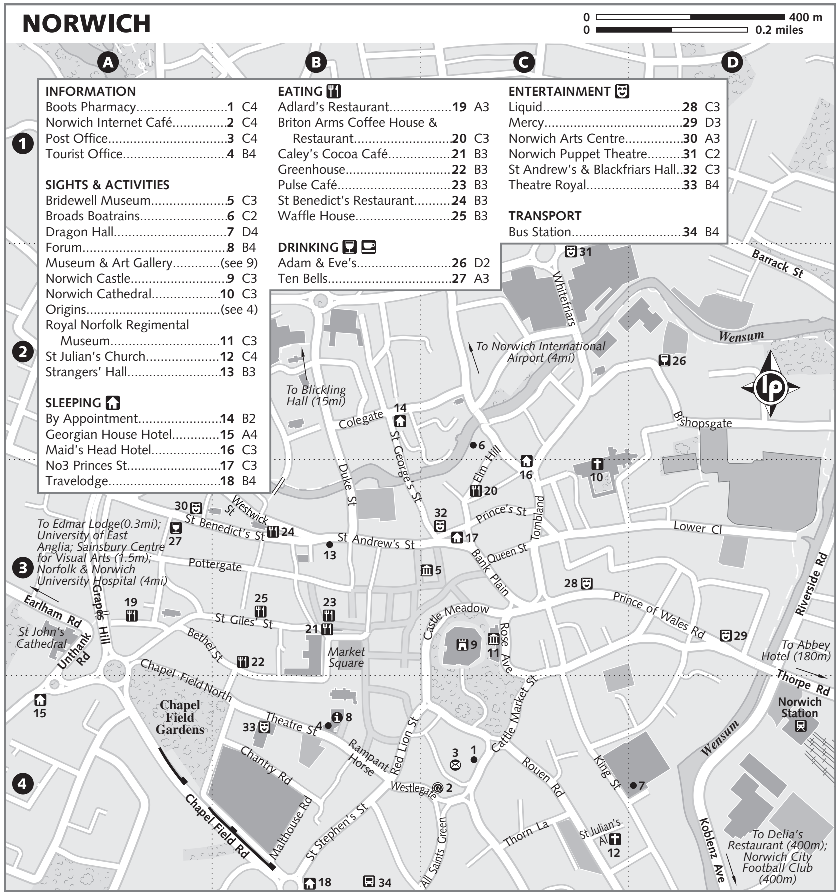
It's now home to a superb interactive **museum** and an **art gallery** to boot. The museum crams in a wealth of history, including lively exhibits on Boudicca and the Iceni, the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, natural history displays and even an Egyptian gallery complete with mummies. Every room is enlivened with plenty of fun for kids, but best of all is the atmospheric keep itself, which sends shivers down the spine with graphic displays on grisly punishments meted out in its days as a medieval prison. Guided tours are offered around the battlements and dungeons.

Meanwhile the art gallery houses paintings of the acclaimed 19th-century Norwich School of landscape painting founded by John Crome, and – trust the English – the world's largest collection of ceramic teapots.

A claustrophobic tunnel from the castle emerges into a reconstructed WWI trench at the **Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum** (☎ 493649; adult/child £3/1.60; ⏰ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), which details the history of the local regiment since 1830. It has a less dramatic entrance from the road.

THE FORUM & ORIGINS

The all-glass **Forum** is the most impressive building to hit Norwich's skyline in decades,



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Barrack St
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Colegate
Bishopsgate
Duke St
St George's St
Elm Hill
Westwick St
St Benedict's St
St Andrew's St
Prince's St
Tombland
Queen St
Bank Plain
Lower Cl
To Edmar Lodge(0.3mi); University of East Anglia; Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (1.5m); Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital (4mi)
Pottergate
Earlham Rd
St John's Cathedral
Unthank Rd
Grapes Hill
St Giles' St
Bethel St
Market Square
Castle Meadow
Rose Ave
Prince of Wales Rd
Riverside Rd
To Abbey Hotel (180m)
Thorpe Rd
Norwich Station
Chapel Field North
Chapel Field Gardens
Theatre St
Chantry Rd
Rampant Horse St
Red Lion St
Westlegate
Castle Market St
Rouen Rd
King St
Wensum
Chapel Field Rd
Malthouse Rd
St Stephen's St
All Saints Green
Thorn La
St Julian's Al
Koblenz Ave
To Delia's Restaurant (400m); Norwich City Football Club (400m)

NORWICH

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and is home to Norfolk's main library, the regional BBC and the tourist office. Here too is family-focused **Origins** (☎ 727920; www.originsnorwich.co.uk; the Forum; adult/child £5.95/3.95; 🕒 10am-5.15pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.45pm Sun), a wonderful interactive museum that surrounds you with film, images and noise in its exploration of 2000 years of regional history. There are numerous buttons to push and games to play; you can have a go at speaking the original Norfolk dialect (not easy), flooding the Norfolk Fens or simply sit back for story time with weird and wonderful tales of the area's mythology.

ELM HILL

An utterly charming medieval cobbled street of crooked timber beams and doors, intriguing shops and snug cafés, this street is also the centre of the local antique business. From here, walk down Wensum St to Tombland, where the market was originally located. Despite its ominous overtones, 'tomb' is an old Norse word for empty, hence space for a market.

NORWICH CATHEDRAL

Focal point of the city, the creamy-coloured Anglican **cathedral** (☎ 218321; suggested donation £4; 🕒 7.30am-7pm May-Sep, 7.30am-6pm Oct-Apr) is an undeniably fine spectacle, its barbed spire soaring higher than any in England except Salisbury, while the size of its cloisters is second to none. But there's far more to this cathedral than its impressive scale.

Begun in 1096, it has managed to hang onto its character as a great Anglo-Norman abbey church more than any other English cathedral except Durham. However, the building's most renowned feature came in 1463 when its nave was topped by magnificent Gothic rib-vaulting punctuated with around 1200 sculpted roof bosses depicting bible stories. Together they represent one of the finest achievements of English medieval masonry, although you'll find yourself longing for a telescope to view them in all their finely detailed glory.

Outside the cathedral's eastern end is the grave of WWI heroine Edith Cavell, a Norfolk nurse who was shot by the Germans for helping POWs to escape. The cathedral close also contains handsome houses and the old chapel of King Edward VI School (where English hero Admiral Nelson was educated). Its current students make up the choir, which performs in at least one of the three services held daily.

ST JULIAN'S CHURCH

Tucked away in a tiny alley, this simple **church** (☎ 767380; St Julian's Alley; admission free; 🕒 7.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) is a shrine to Julian of Norwich and has been a centre for pilgrimage for centuries. Writer and mystic Julian (also known as Juliana, 1342–c 1429) wrote down her religious visions in a collection called *The Revelations of Divine Love,* which is unparalleled in English literature for its clarity and depth of perception. Sadly the cell where she wrote the book was torn down in the Reformation; much of the building was reconstructed after WWII.

OTHER MUSEUMS

Bridewell Museum (☎ 629127; Bridewell Alley; adult/child £3/1.60; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct), housed in a former merchant's house and 14th-century bridewell or 'prison for women, beggars and tramps', is filled with fascinating paraphernalia and reconstructions of Norwich's principal industries right through to a room devoted to the Norwich City football team.

About 250m west of here, along St Andrew's St and Charing Cross is the maze-like early-14th-century town house **Strangers' Hall** (☎ 667229; adult/child £3/1.60; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Wed & Sat), with atmospheric rooms furnished in period styles from Tudor to Victorian. Another remarkable medieval town house, this time built by a local businessman and four-times mayor of Norwich, **Dragon Hall** (☎ 663922; www.dragonhall.org; 115-123 King St; adult/child £5/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec) has a stunning crown-post roof and timber-framed great hall from 1430. It's famous for its darling little carved green-and-orange dragon waving flame-like wings and sticking its tongue out amid the timber ceiling beams.

SAINSBURY CENTRE FOR VISUAL ARTS

Reopened in mid-2006 with a swish new wing, the **Sainsbury Centre** (☎ 593199; www.scva.org.uk; admission free; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm Wed) was Norman Foster's first high-profile building and is filled with an eclectic collection of works by Picasso, Moore, Degas and Bacon, displayed beside art from Africa, the Pacific and the Americas. It's to the west of the city (a 20-minute bus trip from Castle Meadow).

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 0871 666 000; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £8/4; 🕒 hourly 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) runs a hop-on hop-off bus service stopping at nine destinations around the city centre including city hall. Or if you prefer to potter about on the river, **Broads Boatrains** (☎ 701701; www.cityboats.co.uk; adult/child £8.50/5.50) runs cruises from Station Quay off Elm Hill and rents out self-drive boats.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Norwich has no hostel and scarce budget options. Most of the more affordable B&Bs are outside the ring road, and around the train station.

Abbey Hotel (☎ 612915; 16 Stracey Rd; s/d £24/44, d with bathroom £58; ☒) This Victorian terraced house is one of the best-value B&Bs in a row of them up behind the station. It has simple, prim-and-proper floral rooms and pleasant service.

Norwich Central Travelodge (☎ 0870 191 1797; www.travelodge.co.uk; Queens Rd; r £26-55; ☒) Who cares if it has personality when it's new, central and has early-booking online deals in an expensive city? This no-frills addition to the chain is close to the bus station and has pay-and-display parking alongside.

Edmar Lodge (☎ 615599; www.edmarlodge.co.uk; 64 Earlham Rd; s/d from £35/40; 🅿 ☒) This big, blonde-brick B&B with straightforward rooms and a familial atmosphere is situated in a residential area a 10-minute walk from town.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Georgian House Hotel (☎ 615655; www.georgian-hotel.co.uk; 32-34 Unthank Rd; s/d from £60/80; 🅿 ☒) A rambling, elegant Victorian house opposite the Roman Catholic cathedral houses this 28-room boutique hotel, which has spacious modern rooms and a tree-filled garden. The restaurant wins much praise for its use of local ecofriendly ingredients.

No 3 Princes St (☎ 662692; www.3princes-norwich.co.uk; 3 Princes St; s/d £60/85; ☒) This recently restored, handsome red-brick Georgian home in the city's heart has four absolutely beautiful and individually styled en suite rooms. Three of them overlook St Andrew's opposite, the other has a view of a pretty gravel-filled back courtyard. The continental breakfasts are eaten in your room.

our pick **By Appointment** (☎ 630730; 25-29 St George's St; s/d from £70/110; ☒ 💻) This fabulously theatrical and delightfully eccentric B&B occupies three heavy-beamed 15th-century merchant's houses, also home to a labyrinthine restaurant well known for its classic English fare. Its antique furniture, creaky charm and superb breakfasts make this one of the best deals around. Book ahead.

Maid's Head Hotel (☎ 0870 609 6110; www.corushotels.com; Tombland; s/d weeknights £105/125, weekends per person £51; 🅿 ☒ 💻) The stunning black-and-white exterior is the most arresting thing about this 700-year-old coaching inn near the cathedral. There's altogether less personality inside and its 83 modern rooms are comfortable but somewhat soulless.

Eating

BUDGET

Norwich's strong vegetarian scene is a great source of budget value.

our pick **Pulse Café** (☎ 765562; Labour in Vain Yard, Guildhall Hill; snacks £2-4, mains £6-7; 🕒 10am-11pm Mon-Sat) You needn't be vegetarian to fall for this funky lounge bar in the old fire-station stables, which offers outstanding meat-free fare from enchilada to risotto. Eat in the tranquil courtyard or beside lovely low-arched windows inside. The drinks list is surprisingly lengthy, jumping between wines, organic ciders, beers and fruit liqueurs.

Waffle House (☎ 612790; 39 St Giles St; waffles £3-7; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Delicious smells encase this small and ever-popular Belgian waffles café, which uses quality organic and free-range produce to concoct a long list of sweet and savoury creations. It's very family-friendly, but just as beloved by students and professionals.

Greenhouse (☎ 631007; 42-48 Bethel St; snacks & mains £3-7; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) This simple, organic, Fairtrade, vegetarian, vegan and all-round goody-two-shoes café is a hit with students and has a cute little vine-covered, herb-planted terrace.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Briton Arms Coffee House & Restaurant (☎ 623367; 9 Elm Hill; mains £5-10; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) Romantics and traditionalists should make a beeline to this darling little 15th-century thatched cottage tearoom, overhanging cobbled Elm Hill and snug with wooden beams, rustic wooden benches and a little terraced garden. It serves classic English comfort food as well as good coffee and cakes.

Caley's Cocoa Café (☎ 629364; Guildhall, Market Sq; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Chocolate-makers Caley's are a Norwich institution, and you'll see why upon visiting their café in the equally confection-like Guildhall's old Court of Record, a handsome oval Georgian courtroom complete with judge's chair. They serve light meals and, of course, choccies to make your knees wobble.

St Benedict's Restaurant (☎ 765377; 9 St Benedict's St; mains £6-10; ⏲ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) A bubbly little brasserie with excellent husband-and-wife chefs at the helm, St Benedict's has an Edwardian frontage and cheerful modern interior, and an original modern British menu that includes such quirky desserts as Horlicks ice cream.

Adlard's Restaurant (☎ 633522; www.adlards.co.uk; 79 Upper St Giles St; 3-course dinner £35; ⏲ 12.30-10.30pm) This elegant and airy Michelin-starred eatery is the place to splurge on both food and excellent wines. It specialises in modern British cuisine with a French accent and keeps the décor simple and pleasing with wooden floors, large canvases and large windows.

Drinking

Adam & Eve's (☎ 667423; Bishopsgate) A 13th-century brew-house built to quench the thirst of cathedral builders, this is now Norwich's oldest-surviving pub, and an adorable little sunken-floored gem. So snug is it that the upper bar barely fits the barmaid, perhaps why the staff has a reputation for grumpiness! Take a pew outside amid the old-mangle flowerpots, or keep an eye out for the resident ghost in the character-rich interior.

Ten Bells (☎ 667833; 76 St Benedict's St; ⏲ 5pm-midnight, from noon Sat & Sun) This is this kind of faded 18th-century pub where people feel instantly at ease, calmed by the real ales, mellow red velvet and quirky memorabilia and amused by the red phone booth in the corner. It also fancies itself as an intellectuals' hang-out, with poetry readings and arts-school regulars.

Entertainment

Norwich has a flourishing arts scene and pulsating weekend nightlife. For 'what's on' information from ballet to boozing try www.norwichtonight.com.

NIGHTCLUBS

Nightclubs run from 9pm or 10pm to at least 2am.

Liquid (☎ 611113; www.liquidnightclub.co.uk; Prince of Wales Rd; admission £5; ⏲ Mon, Fri & Sat) True to its name, Liquid is a big molten-themed club filled with warped furniture, lava lamps and bubble projections, and playing everything from retro to R&B.

Mercy (☎ 627666; www.mercynightclub.com; 86 Prince of Wales Rd; ⏲ Tue & Thu-Sat) A former cinema complete with mock-marble entrance and Renaissance-inspired décor, Mercy is a massive club with huge projection screens and DJs that favour R&B and club classics.

THEATRE

Once home to Dominican Blackfriars, the spookily Gothic-looking **St Andrew's and Blackfriars' Halls** (☎ 628477; St George's St) now serve as an impressive civic centre where concerts, antique and craft markets, the Music and Arts Festival and even the annual beer festival are held.

Theatre Royal (☎ 630000; www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk; Theatre St) features programmes by touring drama, opera and ballet companies. **Norwich Arts Centre** (☎ 660352; www.norwichartscentre.co.uk; St Benedict's St), also in a medieval church, has a wide-ranging programme of alternative drama, concerts, dance, cabaret and jazz. **Norwich Puppet Theatre** (☎ 629921; www.puppettheatre.co.uk; St James, Whitefriars; adult/child £6/4), set in a cute little repurposed church, goes down a treat with small and big kids.

Getting There & Around

National Express runs buses to London (£15.40, three hours, five daily). First Eastern Counties runs hourly buses to King's Lynn (1½ hours) and Cromer (one hour). There are twice-hourly services to Great Yarmouth (40 minutes).

There are twice-hourly train services to Ely (£12.20, 56 minutes) and Cambridge (£13.20, 1¼ hours), as well as regular links to Peterborough (£16.30, 1½ hours). Twice-hourly trains also go to London Liverpool St (£35.80, two hours).

Norwich International Airport (☎ 411923; www.norwichinternational.com) is just 4 miles north of town, and has cheap flights around Europe and to several British destinations. Hourly buses go from Norwich's train and bus stations.

If you're driving, the city has six Park & Ride locations (buses £2.80 return).

For city cabs, call **Loyal Taxis** (☎ 619619).

NORFOLK BROADS

Nature lovers, birders, boaties and anyone fond of splashing about in the water will undoubtedly want to linger in the county's most beautiful attraction, the Norfolk Broads. A member of the national park's family, the Broads are a mesh of navigable slow-moving rivers, freshwater lakes, wild water meadows, fens, bogs and saltwater marshes, flourishing nature reserves and bird sanctuaries that together form 125 miles of lock-free waterways.

THE BROADS: A NATURAL MANSCAPE

A great deal of head-scratching occurred over the years in response to the puzzle of how and why the Norfolk Broads came to exist. Though the rivers were undoubtedly natural, and many thought the lakes were, too – it's hard to believe they're not when you see them – still nobody could quite explain how they were formed.

However, the mystery was solved when records were discovered in the remains of St Benet's Abbey on the River Bure. They revealed that from the 12th century the land was used for peat-cutting. Since the area had little woodland, peat would have been the only reliable source of fuel and around 1040 hectares were dug over about 200 years.

But dig gaping holes in low-lying land and they're bound to spring a leak someday. And sure enough, water gradually seeped through, causing marshes and eventually lakes to develop. The first to be recorded was Ranworth Broad in 1275. Eventually, the increasingly aquatic diggers could dig no more, and the peat-cutting industry died out. In no other area of England has human effort changed the natural landscape so dramatically.

A boat is by far the best vantage point from which to spy on its myriad birds, butterflies and watery wildlife. The tranquil landscape may not be dramatic in itself, but it is hypnotically peaceful and its very flatness means there's little to shield your binocular vision from the winged and water-bound action taking place on all sides.

The Broads' highest point is at How Hill, just 12m above sea level, which is scattered with many of the picturesque wind pumps first built to drain the marshland and to return water to the rivers.

Orientation

The Broads form a triangle, with the Norwich–Cromer road, the Norwich–Lowestoft road and the coastline as the three sides.

Wroxham, on the A1151 from Norwich, and Potter Heigham, on the A1062 from Wroxham, are the main centres. Along the way there are plenty of waterside pubs, villages and market towns where you can stock up on provisions, and stretches of river where you can feel you are the only person around.

Information

Details on scores of conservation centres and bird-watching hides can be found through the **Broads Authority** (☎ 01603-610734; www.broads-authority.gov.uk), including those at Berney Marshes and Breydon Water, Cockshoot Broad, Hickling Broad, Horsey Mere, How Hill, Ranworth, Strumpshaw Fen, Surlingham Church Marsh and Whitlingham. There's more information on Norfolk Broads at www.norfolkbroads.com and from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) at www.rspb.org.uk.

Getting Around

You can hire a variety of launches – from large cabin cruisers to little craft with outboards – for a couple of hours' gentle messing about on the river.

Boating holidays are operated by **Blakes** (☎ 0870 2202 498; www.blakes.co.uk) and **Hoseasons** (☎ 01502-502588; www.hoseasons.co.uk) among others. Depending on boat size, facilities and season, a boat for two to four people costs around £490 to £840 for a week including fuel and insurance.

Meanwhile boat yards around Wroxham and Potter Heigham hire out boats for quicker cruises, from an hour to several days. Look out for the traditional flat-bottomed boats known as wherries. In the height of summer, prices start from £28 for two hours, £39 for four hours and £67 for one day. Prices drop outside summer.

No previous experience is necessary, but remember to stay on the right-hand side of the river, that the rivers are tidal and to stick to the speed limit – you can be prosecuted for speeding.

If you don't feel like piloting your own boat, try **Broads Tours** (Wroxham ☎ 01603-782207; www.broads.co.uk; the Bridge; Potter Heigham ☎ 01692-670711; Broads Haven), which runs 1½-hour pleasure trips (adult/child £6/4.50) from April to September.

GREAT YARMOUTH

☎ 01493 / pop 90,810

A seaside resort for 250 years, Great Yarmouth is frequently dismissed as a one-trick pony, famous for its neon-lit esplanade of jingling amusement arcades and grim greasy spoons, vast beaches and cheek-by-jowl hotels. But the resort also has a calmer old town sheltering a string of museums. So if ice cream, crazy golf, sandy-toed strolls and the odd educational interlude are on your agenda, Great Yarmouth will happily deliver. And while recent years saw it become increasingly run-down, new investment is now perking up its fortunes and improving its seafront parade.

The **tourist office** (☎ 846345; www.great-yarmouth.co.uk; 25 Marine Pde; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Sep) is on the seafront and can point you towards the lovely Weavers Way (see p479) walking trail, which cuts into the Broads from here.

Most absorbing of Yarmouth's museums is **Time & Tide** (☎ 743930; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; Blackfriars Rd; adult/child £5.80/3.70; ⏰ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), in a Victorian herring-curing works (with a few lingering smells to prove authenticity). It tackles everything from prehistory to penny arcades and naughty postcards, but dwells on maritime heritage and reconstructs typical 17th-century row houses. There's plenty for kids, from touch screens to taking the wheel of a coastal drifter.

A cluster of other museums surround historic South Quay. The 16th-century **Elizabethan House Museum** (NT; ☎ 855746; 4 South Quay; adult/child £3/1.60; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.15-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) is a fine merchant's house faithfully reconstructed to showcase Tudor and Victorian domestic life and home to the 'Conspiracy Room' where Cromwell and chums decided Charles I must be executed.

Around the corner, the **Tolhouse Museum** (☎ 858900; Tolhouse St; adult/child £3/1.60; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.15-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) is a medieval gaol dating back 700 years; it dwells on the macabre inmates, witchcraft, grisly murders and nasty punishments and you can peek inside the spooky cells, all of which makes it an instant hit with kids.

The **Norfolk Nelson Museum** (☎ 850698; www.nelson-museum.co.uk; 26 South Quay; adult/child £2.90/1.50; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) celebrates the life, times, romances and – in obsessive detail – the death of the one-eyed hero of Trafalgar, who was a regular visitor to Great Yarmouth.

B&Bs are everywhere, especially chock-a-block Trafalgar St, and cost from £18 to £35 per person. The worn Edwardian corner-house hostel **Great Yarmouth YHA** (☎ 0870 770 5840; greatyarmouth@yha.org.uk; 2 Sandown Rd; dm £11; ⏰ Apr-Oct) is three-quarters of a mile from the train station, near the beach.

There are hourly buses (40 minutes) and trains (32 minutes) to Norwich.

CROMER

☎ 01263

Once a fashionable Victorian coastal resort, this faintly forlorn but still attractive town is perched on a clifftop overlooking the sea. It's famous for its crabs and has a long sandy beach and scenic coastal walks, but there's also a spooky side to Cromer: the nearby village of Shipden was washed into the sea in the 14th century and in stormy weather, locals say, you can still hear its subaquatic church bells ringing. Here too, Arthur Conan Doyle hatched his ghostly plot for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, after hearing the local legend of Black Shuck, a black canine phantom that roams the shoreline.

Located by the bus station, the **tourist office** (☎ 0871 200 3071; cromertic@north-norfolk.gov.uk; Cadogan Rd; ⏰ 10am-5pm late-May–Aug, 10am-4pm Sep–late-May) has a town map, and can direct you to the small town **museum** (☎ 513543; Church St; adult/child £2.50/1.25; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) nearby.

If you need a fix of 17th- and 18th-century finery, **Felbrigg Hall** (NT; ☎ 837444; adult/child £7/3.50; ⏰ 1-5pm Sat-Wed end Mar-Oct) is one of the best stately homes in Norfolk. It incorporates a walled garden and orangery and is 2 miles southwest of Cromer. The Weavers Way walk runs through its estate.

The tourist office has lists of accommodation, but our favourite is the superbly situated **Captain's House** (☎ 515434; www.captains-house.co.uk; 5 The Crescent; d £68-76; P 🚭), a curvaceous Georgian town house overlooking the seafront in the heart of town. There are three freshly decorated rooms and a hearty breakfast of local sausages, homemade jams and biscuits.

Cromer has direct trains to Norwich hourly Monday to Saturday and services every two hours on Sunday (43 minutes).

CLEY MARSHES

A bird-watching mecca with over 300 species recorded, Cley Marshes sits between Cromer and Wells. There's a **visitors centre** (☎ 740008; www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk; adult/child £3.75/free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) built on high ground but the best spot for bird-watching is in the many hides hidden amid the golden reedbeds.

BLAKENEY POINT

☎ 01263

The pretty village of Blakeney was once a busy fishing and trading port before its harbour silted up. These days it's a good place to jump aboard boat trips out to a 500-strong colony of common and grey seals that live, bask and breed on nearby Blakeney Point. The hour-long trips (adult/child £7/4) run daily April to October but the best time to come is between June and August when the common seals pup. Companies are split between the town's harbour and nearby Morston. They include:

Beans Boat Trips (☎ 740505; www.beansboattrips.co.uk; Morston)

Bishop's Boats (☎ 740753; www.bishopsboats.co.uk; Blakeney Harbour)

WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA

☎ 01328 / pop 2451

A fetching little holiday town with a silty harbour set back from the sea, Wells makes for a charming day trip or stopover. While there are few sights, the attractive Georgian streets, flint cottages and curio shops are good to browse and you can bag fresh fish and join the kids gillying (crabbing) on the waterfront.

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 710885; www.wellsguide.com; Staithe St; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Mar–mid-Jul, Sep & Oct; 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun mid-Jul–Aug) on hand for inquiries and accommodation lists. One agreeable distraction is to catch the **narrow-gauge steam train** (☎ 711630; www.wellswalsinghamrailway.co.uk; adult/child return £7/5.50; duration 30min, 3-5 departures daily Apr-Oct) that chuffs 5 miles to **Little Walsingham**, where there are shrines and a ruined abbey that have drawn pilgrims since medieval times.

Wells YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6084; wellsnorfolk@yha.org.uk; Church Plains; dm £13.95; P 🚭 ♿) is a superb little 32-bed hostel with mostly family-sized rooms and housed in an ornately gabled early-20th-century church hall.

The Coast Hopper bus goes through Wells approximately every two hours on its way between Hunstanton (45 minutes) and Sheringham (40 minutes).

AROUND WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA

Holkham Hall

The high-and-mighty stately home of **Holkham Hall** (☎ 01328-710227; www.holkham.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/3.25; ⏰ noon-5pm Sun-Thu Easter & May-Sep) is an extraordinarily grand Palladian mansion set in a vast deer park designed by Capability Brown. There's also a separate **Bygones Museum** (adult/child £5/2.50 or combined ticket £10/5; ⏰ same as hall) of local folklore and domestic paraphernalia, though you're better off roaming the beautiful park, which is open year-round, or discovering the pristine white-gold sands of nearby Holkham Bay beach.

The hall is 2 miles from Wells.

Burnham Deepdale

☎ 01485

In-the-know backpackers and walkers flock to this lovely coastal spot, with its tiny twin villages of Burnham Deepdale and Brancaster Staithe strung along a rural road. Stroked by the beautiful Norfolk Coastal Path, surrounded by beaches and reedy marshes alive with birdlife, crisscrossed by cycling routes and a base for a whole host of water sports from kitesurfing to kayaking to sailing, Burnham Deepdale is also home to one of the country's best backpacker hostels, around which activities pool.

The hostel operates a superb **tourist office** (☎ 210256; www.deepdalefarm.co.uk ⏰ 10am-4pm Apr-Sep, closed Tue-Wed Oct-Mar), which is flush with information on the surrounding area and can help arrange accommodation and a variety of tours. It also has internet access (per 30 minutes/hour £1/1.50). For more information on the area go to www.itnorfolk.co.uk and www.brancasterstaithe.co.uk.

Anywhere else it might seem odd to have campers poking their heads out of Native American–style tepees, but at ecofriendly backpackers haven and hostel **our pick** **Deepdale Farm** (☎ 210256; www.deepdalefarm.co.uk; camping per adult/child £6.50/3, dm Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat £10.50/12.50, tepees for 6 £75-90 or 2 £60; P 🚭 💻) it's just part of a wonderful experience. The set-up includes small and stylish en suite dorms in converted 17th-century stables, camping space, a coffee shop, laundry, barbecue facilities, lounges and picnic tables. Bike hire is also available. Tepees come with faux-fur mattresses, fuel for the iron chiminea and a lantern.

Just west of the hostel is gastropub extraordinaire the **White Horse** (☎ 210262; www.whitehorsebrancaster.co.uk; mains £5-9; d Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat

Apr-Oct £120/140, Nov-Mar £90/140; 🕒 lunch & dinner; 🅿 🚭 ♿ wi-fi), which has award-winning platters of fresh fish and shellfish, a cosy bar, plus a conservatory and sun deck with lovely views overlooking the tidal marshes. It also has upscale rooms, some with terraces, others with telescopes for bird-watching over the marshes.

The Coast Hopper bus stops outside Deepdale Farm hourly in summer on its run between Sheringham (1¼ hours) and Hunstanton (23 minutes); it also goes less frequently to King's Lynn (one hour). Ask at the tourist office for timetables.

KING'S LYNN

☎ 01553 / pop 34,565

Long labelled 'the Warehouse on the Wash', the medieval port town of King's Lynn was once so busy with waterborne traders that it was said you could cross from one side of the River Great Ouse to the other by simply stepping from boat to boat. Staunchly pious citizens and wild-and-woolly sailors would mingle in its cobbled streets, and fishing fleets would rub woodwork with trading vessels and even New World explorers. Something of the salty port-town tang can still be felt in old King's Lynn, though the petite modern-day port barely passes as a shadow of its former self.

Orientation

Old King's Lynn huddles along the eastern bank of the river. The train station is on its eastern side, while unexciting modern King's Lynn and the bus station are between them. Three markets still take place weekly on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. The biggest is the Tuesday market, held in the unimaginatively named Tuesday Market Pl, while the others are conducted in front of St Margaret's Church.

Information

Banks and ATMs can be found around Tuesday Market Pl.

Post office (☎ 692185; Baxter's Plain)

Tourist office (☎ 763044; kings-lynn.tic@west-norfolk.gov.uk; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun Oct-Mar) In the Custom House (Purfleet Quay). It organises guided walks on historic Lynn (adult/concession/child £3/2.50/1, April to October, duration 1½ to two hours).

Sights

Oddities worth seeking out at grand **St Margaret's Church** include two extraordinarily elaborate Flemish brasses etched with vivid details of a peacock feast, strange dragon-like beasts and a mythical wild man. Outside by the west door there are also flood-level marks – 1976 was the highest, but the 1953 flood claimed more lives. Also remarkable is the 17th-century moon dial, which tells the tide, not the time, and sports a cute dragon-head pointer and man-in-the-moon face.

Another important historical landmark to tick off is the nearby 15th-century **St Margaret's House**, once the warehouse or 'steelyard' of the Hanseatic League (the Northern European merchants' group). Across Queen St is the chequerboard-patterned flint-and-brick **town hall**, dating back to 1421.

Next door, the petite **Town House Museum** (☎ 773450; 46 Queen St; adult/child £2.80/1.60; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) has exhibits on the town from the Middle Ages up to the 1950s; quirkier exhibits include an outdoor privy and basket made from an unfortunate armadillo.

Just around the corner, you can explore the old cells then gawp at the town's priceless civic treasures in the **Old Gaol House** (☎ 774297; adult/child £2.70/1.95; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter); its pride and joy is the breathtaking 650-year-old King John Cup, exquisitely decorated with scenes of hunting and hawking.

Sauntering back along Queen St, look for **Clifton House**, with its barley-sugar columns and strange merchant's watchtower. Near the market square is **Purfleet Quay**, in its heyday the principal harbour. The odd boxy building with the lantern tower is the 17th-century **Custom House**, which houses the tourist office. Outside is a statue of **Captain George Vancouver** (1757–98), a local boy who charted 5000 miles of the northwest coast of the Americas; his family worked in the Custom House.

A short hop north again is the biggest 15th-century guildhall in England. **St George's Guildhall** has been variously incarnated as a warehouse, courthouse and armoury (during the Civil War), and now contains art galleries, a theatre and eateries. Then topping King St is the roomy **Tuesday Market Place**, flanked by handsome old buildings and still host to weekly markets.

On St Nicholas St is the **Tudor Rose Hotel**, a late-15th-century house with its original main door. North of here, on the corner of St Ann's St, is **True's Yard**, where the two remaining cottages of the 19th-century fishing community that used to be here have been restored and now house a **museum** (☎ 770479; www.truesyard.co.uk; North St; adult/child £2.50/1; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) detailing the life of a shellfish fisherman around 1850.

A newly revamped **Lynn Museum** (☎ 775001; Market St) is set to fully reopen in 2007, and to display the famous Bronze Age timber circle dubbed 'Seahenge'.

Festivals

July's **King's Lynn Festival** (☎ 767557; www.kingslynnfestival.org.uk) is East Anglia's most important cultural gathering. The brainchild of Lady Ruth Fermoy, it offers a diverse programme of concerts and recitals of all kinds of 'serious' music, from medieval ballads to opera. The main festival is preceded by the free rock-and-pop festie in and around Tuesday Market Pl, **Festival Too** (www.festivaltoo.co.uk).

Sleeping

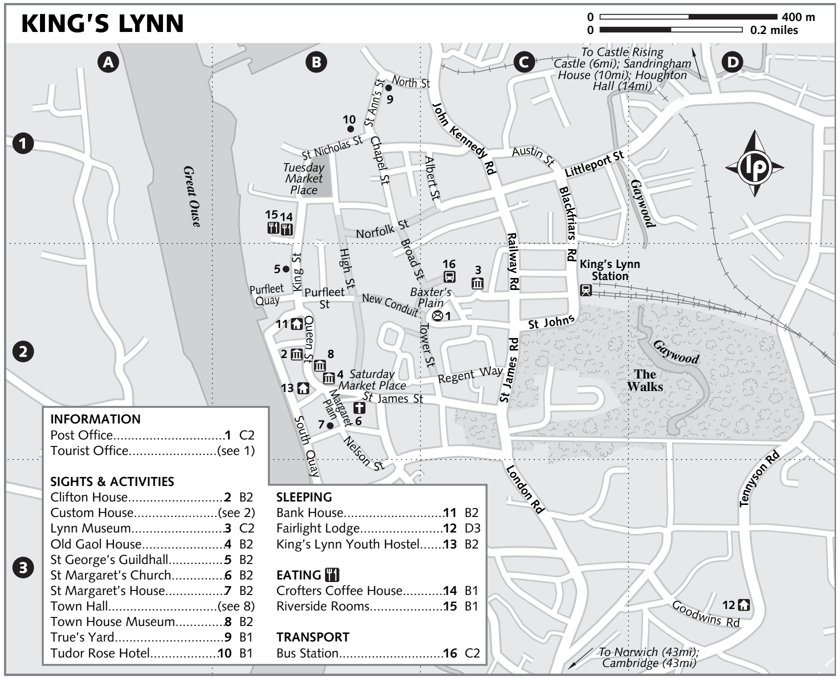
King's Lynn YHA (☎ 0870 770 5902; kingslynn@yha.org.uk; Thoresby College, College Lane; dm £12; 🕒 Easter-Oct by advance booking & varied times rest of year; 🚭) Visitors are warned to watch their heads on low beams in this beautiful early-16th-century courtyard hostel on the quayside. Its facilities are relatively limited but you can't argue with the location.

Fairlight Lodge (☎ 762234; www.fairlightlodge.co.uk; 79 Goodwins Rd; s/d £32/49, without bathroom £27/43; 🅿 🚭) There are seven beautifully furnished country-style rooms, four en suite and some overlooking the pretty garden, at this charming Victorian guesthouse a short walk via parkland from the centre. Thoughtful extras separate it from the competition, among them homemade biscuits in the rooms.

our pick **Bank House** (☎ 660492; www.thebankhouse.co.uk; Kings Staithe Sq; d from £75; 🅿 🚭) This outstanding B&B has ticks in all the right boxes: history, location, atmosphere, comfort and welcome. On the waterfront near the tourist office, it's an 18th-century former bank and is now an elegantly furnished town house with five hotel-standard rooms, mixing original features and modern furnishings.

Eating

Crofters Coffee House (☎ 773134; 27 King St; snacks £3.75-7; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This long brick-vaulted undercroft, once used as a civil-war gunpowder store and now a low-lit café, scores


KING'S LYNN
0 400 m
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A
B
C
D
1
2
3
To Castle Rising Castle (6mi); Sandringham House (10mi); Houghton Hall (14mi)
Great Ouse
North St
St Ann's St
St Nicholas St
Chapel St
Tuesday Market Place
Albert St
John Kennedy Rd
Austin St
Littleport St
Blackfriars Rd
Gaywood
Norfolk St
High St
Broad St
Railway Rd
King's Lynn Station
King St
Purfleet Quay
Purfleet St
New Conduit
Baxter's Plain
St Johns
Queen St
Tower St
Saturday Market Place
Regent Way
St James St
St James Rd
Margaret Plain
South Quay
Nelson St
The Walks
London Rd
Tennyson Rd
Goodwins Rd
To Norwich (43mi); Cambridge (43mi)
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
INFORMATION
Post Office 1 C2
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Clifton House 2 B2
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Lynn Museum 3 C2
Old Gaol House 4 B2
St George's Guildhall 5 B2
St Margaret's Church 6 B2
St Margaret's House 7 B2
Town Hall (see 8)
Town House Museum 8 B2
True's Yard 9 B1
Tudor Rose Hotel 10 B1
SLEEPING
Bank House 11 B2
Fairlight Lodge 12 D3
King's Lynn Youth Hostel 13 B2
EATING
Crofters Coffee House 14 B1
Riverside Rooms 15 B1
TRANSPORT
Bus Station 16 C2

top marks for atmosphere and serves light lunches, sandwiches, soups, salads, hot drinks and cakes. It's in the guildhall arts centre.

Riverside Rooms (☎ 773134; www.riversiderestaurant.com; King St; lunch £7-14, dinner £9-18; 🕘 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☒) Lynn's classiest restaurant overlooks the water from a converted 15th-century warehouse, with crisscrossing beams overhead and elegant white-linen tables below. It serves upscale cuisine from crab omelette to lovely beef-and-Boddingtons (bitter ale) pie.

Getting There & Away

King's Lynn is 43 miles north of Cambridge on the A10. There are hourly trains from Cambridge (£9.30, 48 minutes) and London King's Cross (£25.50, 1¾ hours).

AROUND KING'S LYNN

Castle Rising Castle

There's something bordering on ecclesiastical about the beautifully embellished keep of this **castle** (EH; ☎ 01553-631330; adult/child £3.85/2.20; 🕘 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), built in 1138 and set in the middle of a massive earthwork upon which pheasants scurry about like guards. So extravagant is the stonework that it's no surprise to learn that it shares stonemasons with some of Eastern England's finest cathedrals. It was once the home of Queen Isabella, who (allegedly) arranged the gruesome murder of her husband, Edward II.

It's well worth the trip 4 miles south of King's Lynn. Bus 41 runs here (13 minutes) hourly from King's Lynn bus station.

Sandringham House

Royalists and those bemused by the English sovereigns will have plenty to mull over at this, the Queen's country **estate** (☎ 01553-612908; www.sandringhamestate.co.uk; adult/child £8/5, gardens & museum only £5.50/3.50; 🕘 11am-4.45pm mid-Apr–Oct unless royal family is in residence) set in 25 hectares of landscaped gardens and lakes, and open to the hoi polloi when the court is not at home.

Queen Victoria bought the estate in 1862 for her son, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), but he promptly had it overhauled in the style later named Edwardian. Half of the surrounding 8000 hectares is leased to farm tenants (a royal living doesn't pay for itself, you know), while the rest is managed by the Crown Estate as forestry.

Visitors can shuffle around the house's ground-floor rooms, regularly used by the royal family, then head out to the old stables, which house a flag-waving **museum** filled with diverse royal memorabilia. The vintage royal car collection is simply superb. It includes the very first royal motor from 1900, darling electrical toy cars driven by various princes when they were but knee high, and the buggy in which the recently deceased Queen Mother (who had a famously soft spot for the horses) would bounce around race tracks. For another oddity, look for the pet cemetery just outside the museum.

There are guided tours of the gardens on Friday and Saturday at 11am and 2pm. The **shop** is also worthy of a visit if only to browse the organic goodies produced on the sprawling estate, from bramble or walnut liqueurs to rare-breed pork bangers.

First Eastern Counties bus 411 or Coastliner run here from King's Lynn bus station (22 minutes), 10 miles to the southwest.

LINCOLNSHIRE

A steady stream of movie-makers searching for ready-made period sets find their quarry in the stunning stately homes and time-capsule towns of rural Lincolnshire. This sparsely populated corner of Eastern England has a reputation for being flat, plain and proper, although on closer inspection it's remarkably varied and uncommonly friendly. County capital Lincoln is the perfect place to start, with a stunning Gothic cathedral, Tudor streetscapes and a dramatic hilltop location.

The gently rippling hills of the Lincolnshire Wolds smooth down to eastern marshlands and sandy coast, and the dyke-scored Lincolnshire Fens flat-iron the southeast. While flamboyant medieval wool-wealth churches, red-roofed stone houses and windmills grace many towns, here too you'll find arms-in-the-air beach resort Skegness and rich wildlife reserves where the loudest din is birdsong.

Information

South West Lincs (www.southwestlincs.com)
Visit Lincolnshire (www.visitlincolnshire.com)
Visit the Fens (www.visitthefens.co.uk)

Activities

To follow in the footsteps of history, the 140-mile Viking Way trails from the Humber Bridge through the Lincolnshire Wolds to Oakham in Leicestershire.

It can be more rewarding to explore by bike, however. Wheels can be hired in Lincoln, and leaflets on county cycle trails are available at tourist offices.

Getting There & Away

Other than a speedy rail link between Grantham and London, Lincolnshire isn't the easiest county to get to and around. You're better off on the buses to reach Stamford and Lincoln, and don't be surprised if you have to change services en route.

Getting Around

For regional travel information, contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelineeastmidlands.org.uk) or consult the travel pages of the **Lincolnshire County Council** (www.lincolnshire.gov.uk) website. Useful bus operators include **Lincs Interconnect** (☎ 0845 234 3344; www.lincsinterconnect.com) and **Lincolnshire Roadcar** (www.roadcar.co.uk).

LINCOLN

☎ 01522 / pop 85,595

An under-visited delight, Lincoln's tightly knotted core of cobbled streets and majestic medieval architecture is enough to leave visitors breathless, albeit as much for its thigh-pumping slopes as the superb stonework and timber-framed treasures to be found there. Uptown Lincoln is crowned by an extraordinary hill-topping cathedral, an unusual Norman castle and compact Tudor streets, although the town then tumbles down the hillside losing charm and picking up modern pace as it goes. At the hill's base, the university breathes life into a waterfront quarter where bars are positioned to watch boats come and go. While there's little to keep you for a longer stay, Lincoln has a welcoming aura and enough cultural clout in its centre to keep you very happy for a day or two at a stretch.

History

With a hill that affords views for miles around and a river for swift sea access, it's hardly surprising that Lincoln's defensive location has been exploited by invading forces for the last 2000 years. The Romans set up camp soon after arriving in Britain and in the 11th century the Normans speedily constructed a castle after their invasion. The city yo-yoed between Royalist and Parliamentarian forces during the Civil War, and the warfare theme continued into the 20th century, when Lincoln's heavy engineering industry spawned the world's first tank, which saw action in WWI.

Orientation

The cathedral stands imperiously on top of the hill in the old city, with the castle and other attractions nearby. Three-quarters of a mile downhill is the new town, and the bus and train stations. Joining the two is the appositely named Steep Hill, and believe us, they're not kidding. Even locals stop to catch their breath.

Information

Several banks and ATMs sit on High St. Check www.lincolntoday.co.uk and www.lincoln.gov.uk for events listings.

Abbey Washeteria (☎ 530272; 197 Monks Rd; per load £3; 🕘 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) Self-service laundrette.
County hospital (☎ 512512; off Greetwell Rd)
Post office (☎ 526031; 90 Bailgate)
Sun Internet Café (36 Portland St; 🕘 11am-7pm Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (tourism@lincoln.gov.uk; www.visitlincolnshire.com) Main branch (☎ 873213; 9 Castle Hill; 🕘 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu Oct-Jun); Cornhill branch (☎ 873256; 21 the Cornhill; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun)

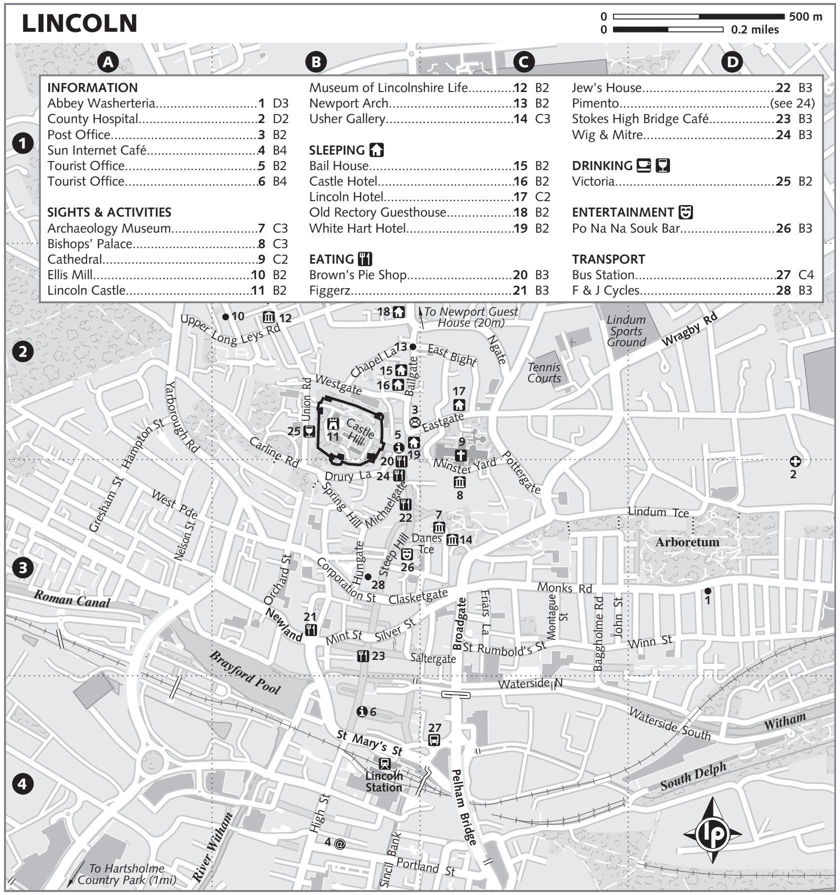
Sights

The tourist office sells the Lincoln Time Travel Pass, which gives access to several heritage sites, including the castle, cathedral and Bishops' Palace for single/family £9.99/20 and lasts three/seven days.

LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

All kinds of marvels and mischief can be found in the county's top attraction, **Lincoln Cathedral** (☎ 544544; www.lincolncathedral.com; adult/under 16yr £4/1; 🕘 7.15am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7.15am-6pm Sun Jun-Aug, 7.15am-6pm Mon-Sat, 7.15am-5pm Sun Sep-May). This soaring edifice has three great towers that dominate the city, one of which is the third highest in England at 81m, but it's claimed that until a storm in 1547 its spire was a jaw-dropping 160m high, topping even the great pyramids of Giza.

An eye-stretching façade carved with gargoyles, kings, dragons and hunters leers over the Great West Door. There are some fabulous but grisly friezes being steadily restored by stonemasons here, including maniacal devils jabbing sinners into the jaws of hell. On closer inspection you'll spot that the façade


LINCOLN
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A
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To Newport Guest House (20m)
Upper Long Leys Rd
Lindum Sports Ground
Wragby Rd
Chapel La
East Bight
Ngate
Tennis Courts
Westgate
Bailgate
Union Rd
Castle Hill
Eastgate
Yarborough Rd
Hampton St
Carline Rd
Drury La
Minster Yard
Pottergate
Gresham St
West Pde
Nelson St
Spring Hill
Michaelgate
Danes Tce
Lindum Tce
Arboretum
Hungate
Steep Hill
Corporation St
Orchard St
Clasketgate
Monks Rd
Roman Canal
Newland
Mint St
Silver St
Broadgate
Friars La
Montague St
Baggholme Rd
John St
Winn St
St Rumbold's St
Saltergate
Brayford Pool
Waterside N
Waterside South
Witham
St Mary's St
Lincoln Station
South Delph
Pelham Bridge
High St
Sincil Bank
Portland St
River Witham
To Hartsholme Country Park (1mi)

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Archaeology Museum	7	C3
Bishops' Palace	8	C3
Cathedral	9	C2
Ellis Mill	10	B2
Lincoln Castle	11	B2
Museum of Lincolnshire Life	12	B2
Newport Arch	13	B2
Usher Gallery	14	C3
SLEEPING		
Bail House	15	B2
Castle Hotel	16	B2
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Figgerz	21	B3
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Pimento	(see 24)	
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DRINKING		
Victoria	25	B2
ENTERTAINMENT		
Po Na Na Souk Bar	26	B3
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	27	C4
F & J Cycles	28	B3

is divided into two eras; the lower of which is from the Norman cathedral toppled in an earthquake in 1185, and the rest dates to the building's 12th- and 13th-century reconstruction by Bishop Hugh of Avalon (St Hugh). The saint himself tops a pinnacle on one side of the West Front, and his counterpart on the other side is a swineherd who devoted his meagre lifesavings to the cathedral's reconstruction.

Inside the lofty nave, there's a chunky black-marble font from the 11th century and ringed with fearsome mythological beasts. Two awesome stained-glass rose windows face each other at either end of the transepts. The unique Dean's Eye still contains glass from the 13th century, while the 14th-century Bishop's Eye has some truly exquisite carved stone-leaf tracery.

Up in the central tower, the veteran Victorian bell Great Tom still swings its ponderous 2m, 270kg bulk to sound the hours. Just beyond the tower, the elaborate choir screen is studded with grotesque characters, including a stonemason sticking out his tongue just to the left of the door.

St Hugh's Choir itself is topped by some quirky vaulting dubbed the 'crazy vault' for its odd angles, while the superbly carved and canopied stalls below are a classic example of medieval craftsmanship. Just beyond this, the Angel Choir is graced by 28 angels carved high up the walls. It was built as a shrine to St Hugh but modern pilgrims are mostly preoccupied with hunting for the famous Lincoln Imp, a lovably roguish little horned character that is now the city's emblem. Various fun legends surround the imp, but we like the one that says the mischievous creature was caught chatting up one of the carved angels and was promptly turned to stone.

One last stop before leaving: take a peek at the cathedral's round Chapterhouse, where the climax of *The Da Vinci Code* film was shot in 2005.

There are one-hour tours at least twice a day plus less frequent tours of the tower. Evensong takes place daily except Wednesday at 5.15pm (3.45pm on Sunday), and Eucharist is sung at 9.30am on Sunday.

BISHOPS' PALACE

Beside the cathedral are the ravaged but still imposing ruins of the 12th-century **Bishops' Palace** (EH; ☎ 527468; adult/child £3.70/1.90; ⏰ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar), which was gutted by parliamentary forces during the Civil War. In its day it was the power base of medieval England's largest diocese, and highlights of scrambling around its remaining walls include a barrel-vaulted undercroft and walled terrace garden with wonderful panoramas of the town below.

LINCOLN CASTLE

After installing himself as king in 1066, William the Conqueror speedily set about building castles to keep his new kingdom in line. **Lincoln Castle** (☎ 511068; www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/lincolncastle; adult/child £3.80/2.50, event days £6/4; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, to 4pm daily Oct-Mar) was one of his first. While it's a fascinating castle with dramatic battlements to charge around and one of only four originals of democratic-milestone **Magna Carta** (dated 1215; see p45) on display, Lincoln Castle also has its spooky side. It was home to the city's court and prison for centuries, and public executions here used to draw thousands of bloodthirsty spectators. Here too is a chilling prison chapel with coffin-style pews that inmates were locked into.

There are free tours of the castle at 11am and 2pm daily from April to September and on weekends in winter.

THE COLLECTION: ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Opened to acclaim in 2005, this **archaeology museum** (☎ 550990; www.thecollection.lincoln.museum; Danes Tce; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm) aims to inspire budding Indiana Joneses, underlining how Lincolnshire's rich past can be uncovered by anyone at any time, a point neatly underscored by a wonderful Roman mosaic discovered during the museum's construction. Other exciting artefacts include an Iron Age votive sword and impressive 7m log dugout. Kids will have a blast with the games, touch screens, dress ups and more.

Just east is the historic **Usher Art Gallery** (☎ 527980; Lindum Rd; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), which now belongs to the same complex but sits separately in a grand mansion amid parkland. It dwells on the paintings and drawings of Peter de Wint (1784–1849) but also has works by JMW Turner, LS Lowry and others. The museum is also temporary home to bits and bobs belonging to Lincolnshire-born poet Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–92), but you'll need to be accompanied to a back room to see them.

OTHER SIGHTS

The whole length of **Steep Hill** is a delight to explore (at least until the climb back up), crowded with black-and-white Tudor beauties and curious antiquarian bookshops. Of particular note, however, is the Romanesque stone **Jew's House**, which is easily one of the best and earliest examples of 12th-century domestic architecture in Britain. It's now an upmarket restaurant (see p494).

Back up and through town, rough-edged **Newport Arch** (Bailgate) dates back even further as it was built by the Romans, and is the oldest arch in Britain that still has traffic passing through it.

History buffs may also make the short trek north to the **Museum of Lincolnshire Life** (☎ 528448; adult/child £3/2; ⏰ 10am-5pm May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr), displaying everything from a reconstructed Edwardian nursery to an early tank named 'Flirt' that was famous for all the wrong reasons during WWI. Round the corner from the museum is cute little **Ellis Mill** (☎ 528448; Mill Rd; adult/child £1/50p) windmill.

Tours

Guided **walking tours** (adult/child £3/1.50, 1½hr) run from outside the tourist office in Castle Hill at 11am and 2pm Saturday and Sunday from June to September, and at 11am weekdays in July and August. Also from the tourist office, a 1¼-hour **ghost walk** (☎ 874056; www.lincolnhistorywalks.co.uk; adult/under 12yr £4/2) departs at 7pm Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hartsholme Country Park (☎ 873578; hartsholmecp@lincoln.gov.uk; Skellingthorpe Rd; tent £6-14; 🕒 Mar-Oct) A stand-out camping ground next to a sprawling nature reserve, filled lovely lakes, woods and meadows. It's 3 miles southwest of the train station. Take the regular daytime SB6 or evening 66A bus towards Birchwood Estate from Lincoln bus station; alight at Swanpool (15 minutes).

Old Rectory Guesthouse (☎ 514774; 19 Newport; s/d from £25/46; Ⓟ ⊠) While well kept and charmingly run by its motherly host, this attractive red-brick Edwardian building clearly hasn't updated much since the last century. But far from minding, you'll find that adds to the homely character.

MIDRANGE

Newport Guest House (☎ 528590; www.newportguesthouse.co.uk; 26-28 Newport; s/d/f £35/52/70; Ⓟ ⊠) Bright, fresh-feeling rooms with contemporary style and plenty of space, plus a filling Lincolnshire breakfast are the winning qualities of this cheerful and efficiently run guesthouse just outside the city's historic core.

our pick **Bail House** (☎ 520883; www.bailhouse.co.uk; 34 Bailgate; s/d from £64.50/79, d superior £139-165; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻 wi-fi) Stone walls, worn flagstones, Mediterranean-style gardens and one room with an extraordinary medieval timber-vaulted ceiling are only a few of the charms of this lovingly restored town house in central Lincoln. There's even a heated outdoor swimming pool for fair-weather days.

Castle Hotel (☎ 538801; www.castlehotel.net; Westgate; s/d from £70/90; Ⓟ ⊠) A hefty red-brick former school from the Victorian era, this privately owned hotel looks up towards the castle battlements. It has personable and attentive staff, a mixed bunch of rooms with sober if fussy furnishings, and good facilities.

TOP END

White Hart Hotel (☎ 526222; www.whitehart-lincoln.co.uk; Bailgate; s/d £75/100; Ⓟ ⊠ wi-fi) You can't get more central or venerable than Lincoln's grand dame of hotels, neatly sandwiched between castle and cathedral and with a history of hostelry here dating back 600 years. It has four dozen luxurious country-casual rooms, a few with partial views of the cathedral façade.

Lincoln Hotel (☎ 520348; www.thelincolnhotel.com; Eastgate; d £80-150; Ⓟ ⊠ ♿ wi-fi) This pristine retro-chic hotel shrugs off its blockish exterior and lays on sleek modern rooms with funky lights in unexpected places, stars on the doors, clean lines and bright colours. In a disorientating juxtaposition, it lies opposite the ancient cathedral's backside, of which front-facing rooms have simply unbeatable views.

Eating

Pimento (☎ 544880; 27 Steep Hill; mains £4-7; 🕒 10am-5pm) This split-level parlour café is a must for tea and coffee connoisseurs and also sells good-value dishes using local ingredients and delicious Lincolnshire plum bread. The front room has a big roasting machine, making it the warmest spot to be. And with 40 exotic brews the drinks menu resembles a cocktail list. Haiti voodoo-comet coffee anyone?

Brown's Pie Shop (☎ 527330; 33 Steep Hill; pies £8-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Rustic-chic in a nutshell, this popular pie shop serves Lincolnshire's speciality pies in lovely brick-vaulted cellars with candlelit tables and bare-wood floors. The local wild-rabbit pie is terrific and the stout pie popular.

Wig & Mitre (☎ 535190; www.wigandmitre.com; 30 Steep Hill; mains £11-20; 🕒 8am-midnight) Civilised pub-restaurant the Wig has been steadily upgrading its menu for three decades and now considers itself an upscale eatery despite retaining the mellow cosiness of an old-world watering hole. No music will disturb your meal here, and the candle-lit evening meals are good for romantic liaisons.

our pick **Jew's House** (☎ 524851; Steep Hill; set lunch/dinner £12/27; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Pass through the ancient round-arched doorway of this 12th-century stone house and you'll immediately know you're in for a treat. This ancient house, an attraction in its own right, is flush with antiques and oil paintings, and its award-winning Anglo-French cuisine will not disappoint. Dress smart and book ahead.

Some more options:

Figgerz (☎ 576277; 1 Newland; mains takeaway/eat-in £3/4.50; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Sat) Local organic fare at sensible prices.

Stokes High Bridge Café (☎ 513825; 207 High St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) A delightfully precarious-looking 16th-century half-timbered teashop.

Drinking & Entertainment

Victoria (☎ 536048; 6 Union Rd) A serious beer-drinker's pub with a pleasant patio looking up at the castle's western walls, Victoria has a huge selection of guest brews, cask ales, thick stouts and superb ciders and preserves a mellow historic ambience undisturbed by sports or flashy lights. The pub runs two beer festivals a year.

Po Na Na Souk Bar (☎ 525828; 280-281 High St; 🕒 10pm-3am Mon-Sat) Every night is different at this Moroccan-themed chain club, which alternately rocks to the sounds of indie, rock, R&B and house music, with some high-profile international guest DJs to get the party started. It has some kaleidoscopic cocktails, and there are hookah pipes in the chill-out room.

Getting There & Away

Lincoln is 142 miles from London, 94 miles from Cambridge and 81 miles from York.

National Express runs a direct service between Lincoln and London (£21, 4¾ hours) daily. Buses also run daily from Lincoln to Birmingham (£13, three hours).

Getting to and from Lincoln usually involves changing trains. There are hourly links to Boston (£8.40, 1¼ hours) and Skegness (£11.50, two hours); change at Sleaford. There are also hourly trains to Cambridge (£24.50, 2½ hours); change at Peterborough or Ely. Links to Grantham (£7.50, 1½ hours) run twice hourly.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

F&J Cycles (☎ 545311; 41 Hungate; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) rents a few secondhand bikes for £6 to £8 per day and up to £40 per week.

BUS

Regular buses link the lower town bus and train stations with the uptown cathedral area. To avoid the climb up Steep Hill, a 'Walk and Ride' electric bus also runs every 20 minutes during the day from outside the House of Fraser store on High St to Castle Sq (90p, five minutes).

GRANTHAM

☎ 01476 / pop 34,592

Those that recall the colourful 12-year reign of Britain's first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, will find a fine model of her vision for Britain in the pleasing red-brick town of her birth. Baroness Thatcher first came into the world above her father's grocery shop at 2 North Pde, now a chiropractor's clinic with a modest plaque to signify its former inhabitant. Sir Isaac Newton was also born and raised in the vicinity, and his statue stands erect in front of the guildhall (as yet conspicuously unaccompanied by a statue of Maggie).

The **tourist office** (☎ 406166; granthamtic@southkesteven.gov.uk; St Peter's Hill; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) is in the guildhall complex.

Until a commemorative statue is erected, the Iron Lady must content herself with her latex puppet from the hit 1980s political satire *Spitting Image* (see the boxed text, p496) in the town's **museum** (☎ 568783; St Peter's Hill; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat). Here too is one of her famous handbags and spangled gowns, as well as displays on Sir Isaac Newton and another of Grantham's trailblazing women, Edith Smith, who became Britain's first policewoman in 1914.

The part 13th-, part 16th-century parish church of **St Wulfram's** (🕒 9am-4pm Apr-Sep, 9am-12.30pm Oct-Mar) is easily tracked down thanks to its needle-sharp 85m spire. It has an interesting crypt chapel and hidden up a steep stairwell is a rare 16th-century chained library where a young Isaac Newton once pored over his studies.

One of several favoured sets for ruffle-and-lace English period dramas in the region, the Restoration country-mansion **Belton House** (NT; ☎ 566116; A607; adult/under 16yr £8/4.50, grounds only £6/3.50; 🕒 12.30-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct) sits sedately amid a 400-hectare park 3 miles northeast of Grantham. Built in 1688 for Sir John Brownlow, it shelters some astonishingly ornate woodcarvings attributed to the master Dutch carver Grinling Gibbons. In the beautiful gardens is a sundial made famous in Helen Cresswell's children's classic *Moondial*. Bus 609 (15 minutes) runs here from near Grantham's train station.

Sleeping & Eating

Red House (☎ 579869; www.red-house.com; 74 North Pde; s/d £27/55; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻) This handsome Georgian town house near Maggie's birthplace has large, spick-and-span rooms, three with en suite, three without. The welcome is very friendly, beauty treatments are available and some rooms even boast a fridge and microwave.

Angel & Royal Hotel (☎ 565816; www.angelandroyal.co.uk; High St; s/d from £80/100; Ⓟ ⊠) This veteran coaching inn claims to be England's oldest, with no less than seven kings of England purportedly having stayed here since 1200. Its 29

PUPPET POLITICIANS

England's incisive political satire is notorious for being almost as vicious as its tabloid press, and many would point the finger at a controversial but iconic series that ran here from 1984 to 1996 as being where it all got a little bit nasty. *Spitting Image* was a satirical puppet show that crudely caricatured public figures, who were voiced by a modern-day who's who of British impressionists, many of whom went on to lampoon politicians in their own shows. At its height *Spitting Image* was deemed so subversive that it was banned from showing in the run-up to a general election. And while politicians were hammered by the show, they recognised that to be on it was to be somebody, so many more secretly craved their own puppet persona.

The most recognisable and enduring of all its latex stars was then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who was portrayed as a tyrannical man-woman who wore suits and used urinals. Her latex likeness now leers from behind glass in Grantham's museum while the town of her birth still awaits a genuine statue of its Iron Lady.

rooms are each individually decorated, beds occupied by a teddy bear, quaint floral patterns and copious olde-Englishe charm. The beautiful period-styled King's Dining Room is open for fine dining at weekends.

Beehive (☎ 404554; Castlegate) This famous old pub is best known not for its drinks or ambience but for its sign – a real beehive full of live South African bees! Buzzing around since 1830, it's one of the oldest bee populations in the world. Cheap lunches and drinks are available.

Getting There & Away

Grantham is 25 miles south of Lincoln. Interconnect bus 1 runs between the two, hourly Monday to Saturday and four times on Sunday (one hour 10 minutes). Bus K17 (three daily Monday to Saturday) runs to Stamford (1½ hours), as does National Express (£5.70, 30 minutes).

You'll need to change at Newark to get to Lincoln by train (£7.50, 1½ hours, two per hour). Direct trains run from London King's Cross to Grantham (£25, 1¼ hours) hourly throughout the day.

STAMFORD

☎ 01780 / pop 19,525

Come rain or shine, this elegant town seems bathed in a warm glow thanks to the beautiful honey-coloured Lincolnshire limestone with which it's built. Sloping gently up from the River Welland and a sprawling waterside park, its winding streets overflow with fine medieval and Georgian buildings. And if you feel as though you're walking through a period drama, there's a reason: Stamford has been used as a set for more drama productions than you can shake a clapperboard at.

The **tourist office** (☎ 755611; stamfordtic@southkesteven.gov.uk; 27 St Mary's St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) is in the Stamford Arts Centre, and helps with accommodation. Staff can also arrange guided town walks (£3.50) and chauffeured punt trips.

The **Stamford Museum** (☎ 766317; Broad St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, & 1-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) has a muddle of displays on the town's history, including models of circus-performing midget Charles Stretton (aka Tom Thumb) and local heavyweight Daniel Lambert, who tipped the scales at an astounding 336kg in life. After Lambert's death, the tiny Stretton caused great hilarity by playing hide and seek in Lambert's voluminous clothes.

Sleeping & Eating

Stamford Lodge (☎ 482932; www.stamfordlodge.co.uk; 66 Scotgate; s/d £45/65) This former bakehouse sits in a lovely row of 18th-century Georgian buildings and has exposed stone walls and sloping ceilings. Rooms are sprucely decorated with modern furnishings and facilities and small en suites. The friendly hostess is keen to help out, and breakfasts are excellent. There's pay-and-display parking across the road.

our pick **George** (☎ 750750; www.georgehotelofstamford.com; 71 St Martin's St; s/d from £78/115, superior d £185; 🅿 ⊠ 💻) Recognised by a gallows sign across the road, welcoming travellers but warning off highwaymen, this wonderful riverside hotel likes to call itself 'England's greatest coaching inn', and with some justification. Parts of it date back 1000 years and its long history is reflected in its 47 luxurious rooms, each of which has its own unique character and flair, décor and price tag. The oak-panelled restaurant serves classy British and international cuisine.

Meadows (☎ 762739; www.themeadowsrestaurant.co.uk; 1-2 Castle Pl; mains £8-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This lovely semiformal restaurant in a 17th-century stone building serves traditional English dishes from sea bass to good ol' Lincolnshire sausages. It has a terrace at the back overlooking the meadows.

Getting There & Away

Stamford is 46 miles from Lincoln and 21 miles south of Grantham.

National Express serves Stamford once daily from London (£12.80, 2¾ hours) via Lincoln (£8.30, 1½ hours). Kimes operates three buses daily Monday to Saturday between Stamford and Grantham (1½ hours). National Express also runs two buses daily (£5.70, 30 minutes). Delaine Buses run to Peterborough (one hour, hourly).

There are hourly trains to Cambridge (£15.80, 1¼ hours) and Ely (£11.80, 55 minutes). Trains to Norwich (£19.60, 2¼ hours) usually involve changing at Ely or Peterborough.

AROUND STAMFORD

Burghley House

This staggeringly ostentatious **Elizabethan palace** (☎ 01780-752451; www.burghley.co.uk; adult/child incl sculpture garden £9/4; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct) was built to awe and still does a darn good job of it. Situated just a mile south of Stamford, Burghley (pronounced bur-lee) is the home of the Cecil family and was built by Queen Elizabeth I's adviser William Cecil. These days it's a regular star of the silver screen, with hit films like *The Da Vinci Code* and *Pride and Prejudice* just some of the productions utilising its showy interior as a dramatic stage.

Its roof bristles with cupolas, pavilions, belvederes and chimneys, and every inch of its 18 magnificent staterooms seems drenched with lavish finery. Hundreds of masterpieces from Gainsborough to Brueghel hang from the walls, while other rooms skip the frames and are splashed with wonderful 17th-century Italian murals overflowing with muscles, mammaries and mythology. Most impressive is the Heaven Room, which writhes with floor-to-ceiling gods and goddesses disporting among the columns; on the flip side, there's the nearby stairway to Hell, which depicts Satan as a giant cat-eyed uterus devouring the world. Other highlights include cavernous Tudor kitchens decorated with turtle skulls left over from the master's soup and an exhibit detailing the career of David Cecil, the Lord Burghley who was an Olympic athlete and part-inspiration for the film *Chariots of Fire*.

Meanwhile the landscaped deer park outside is now home to a splendid **sculpture garden** with organic-looking contemporary works sprinkled sympathetically and often humorously throughout the grounds.

The house is a pleasant 15-minute walk through the park from Stamford train station. The internationally famous **Burghley Horse Trials** take place here in early September.

BOSTON

☎ 01205 / pop 35,124

It was from this major medieval port that the Pilgrim Fathers – the first white settlers of the US – began their break for the freedom of the New World in 1607. These religious separatists suffered persecution and imprisonment, yet when word of their success made it back here, a crowd of locals followed them across the Atlantic to found a namesake town in the new colony of Massachusetts. Lying near the mouth of the River Witham, in the bay known as The Wash, the town is now a mere blip on the map in comparison to its US namesake, but it has hung onto much of its medieval appearance, timber-framed Tudor buildings and labyrinthine street grid with two main streets flanking the river and linked by footbridges.

The **tourist office** (☎ 356656; ticboston@boston.gov.uk; Market Pl; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round) is under the Assembly Rooms on Market Pl.

Sights & Activities

In keeping with the town's high-flying status in medieval times, the early-14th-century **St Botolph's Church** (☎ 362864; church free, tower adult/under 18yr £2.50/1; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, btwn services Sun) has a showy 88m-high tower, fondly dubbed the Boston Stump for its square tip as its fenland base was not firm enough to support a thin spire. Puff your way up the 365 steps on a clear day and you'll see to Lincoln, 32 miles away. Downstairs there's a 17th-century **pulpit** from which fiery vicar John Cotton delivered five-hour catechisms in the 1630s, and convinced his parishioners to emigrate in the footsteps of the Pilgrim Fathers.

You can see the very cells in which the Pilgrim Fathers were imprisoned in the 14th-century **guildhall** (☎ 365954; South St; adult/child £1.25/free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 1.30-5pm Sun May-Sep), now

THE FENS

One of England's most melancholy landscapes, the manmade Fens were once strange and desolate marshlands that stretched from Cambridge north to The Wash and beyond into Lincolnshire. Amid the wilderness lived isolated pockets of people who survived by fishing and farming scraps of land among a maze of waterways. Though Romans and land-hungry medieval monasteries dabbled with building flood banks to exploit the fertile land, it took the 17th-century arrival of Dutch engineer Sir Cornelius Vermuyden to begin the wholesale draining of the Fens. Not that the scheme proved easy or unopposed – unhappy Fen folk were known to diligently dig the dykes during the day, then sneak back at night when their landlords weren't looking and fill in their hard work! However, with the aid of wind and later steam pumps, the flat, open plains with their rich, black soil were created. Now an eerie, windswept but strangely mesmerising landscape, the region has inspired a wealth of literature, including Graham Swift's excellent novel *Waterland*.

As the world's weather pattern changes and the sea level rises, however, the Fens are beginning to disappear underwater again. It's estimated that by 2030 up to 400,000 hectares could be lost. To find out more on the past and future of the Fens, visit **Fenscape Discovery Centre** (☎ 01775-761161; www.fenscape.org; A151 at A16; admission free) near Spalding, Lincolnshire, or appreciate its wildlife at **Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve** (☎ 01353-720274; Lode Lane, Wicken; adult/child £4.50/2; 🕑 dawn-dusk), 8 miles south of Ely.

a visitor centre with multimedia eulogies on their struggles. The museum will reopen from renovations in mid-2007.

About 800m northeast of Market Pl is the fully functional five-sailed **Maud Foster Windmill** (☎ 352188; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕑 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Jul & Aug, Wed, Sat & Sun only Sep-Jun), built in 1819 and the tallest working windmill in the country with no less than seven floors that creak and tremble with its flour-grinding exertions. It's well worth the walk, just don't wear black or you'll come out grey.

Sleeping & Eating

Palethorpe House (☎ 359000; 138 Spilsby Rd; s/d £50/70; 🅿 ⊠ 🖥) This delightful vine-covered Victorian villa has just two beautifully refurbished en suite rooms complete with living room, and it's situated a 10-minute walk from Boston's centre. It only serves continental breakfasts during the week.

Maud's Tea Rooms (☎ 352188; Maud Foster Windmill, Willoughby Rd; mains £5-8; 🕑 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Jul & Aug, Wed, Sat & Sun only Sep-Jun) A quaint teashop with a difference, Maud's is set in its namesake tower windmill, and serves a wealth of cakes baked the old-fashioned way with organic flour whisked straight from the millstone. It also offers filling lunches that include Lincolnshire cheeses, local sausages and vegetarian options.

Getting There & Away

Interconnect 5 buses run hourly between Lincoln and Boston (1½ hours), or you can take the train from Lincoln, changing at Sleaford (£8.40, 1¼ hours).

SKEGNESS

☎ 01754 / pop 16,806

Famous for its saccharine candy-floss fun, vast bucket-and-spade beaches and a seafront parade drowning in greasy fish-and-chip shops, bleeping and flashing penny arcades and kiss-me-quick hats, 'Skeggy' is a classic English seaside resort where many thousands of Britons descend each year to do brave impressions of sunbathing, inhale ice cream, fly kites and hit the town for nightly disco, bingo or cheesy cabaret. But the resort also works to keep fresh generations of punters rolling in, and its newer attractions include an orphaned seal pup sanctuary, facilities for windsurfing and kitesurfing and a fancy new skate park.

Cheap-and-cheerful B&Bs are just about everywhere and start at just £18 per person, but the **tourist office** (☎ 899887; www.funcoast.co.uk; Grand Pde; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) is also happy to help you find digs. It sits opposite the **Embassy Centre** (☎ 768333; www.embassytheatre.co.uk), the mothership of Skeggy's cabaret scene and the place to watch your favourite Abba tribute band. From July to September, this stretch of beach suffuses the night sky with light pollution as 25,000 glowing light bulbs ignite the Skegness Illuminations.

Skegness is simple to reach by public transport. Interconnect 7 buses depart hourly from Boston (1¼ hours) Monday to Saturday. From Lincoln, Interconnect 6 buses run hourly Monday to Saturday and five times on Sunday (1¾ hours).

There are trains at least hourly Monday to Saturday and nine on Sunday between Skegness and Boston (32 minutes).

LOUTH

☎ 01507 / pop 15,930

A bustling market town of narrow lanes lined with Georgian and Victorian architecture, Louth straddles the River Lud between the Wolds to the west and the marshes of the Lincolnshire coast. The town is cleaved into two hemispheres, as the zero longitude line splits the town; it is marked by a plaque in Eastgate and sculptures dot the line as part of the Louth Art Trail. Louth's other claim to fame is that it was the scene of a dramatic if short-lived revolt against Henry VIII in 1536.

The **tourist office** (☎ 609289; louthinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk; New Market Hall, off Cornmarket; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4.30pm Oct-Easter) has maps and can help find accommodation.

Sights

While mustering the strength to climb Louth's main attraction – the tallest parish church spire in England – pop into **Louth Museum** (☎ 601211; www.louthmuseum.co.uk; 4 Broadbank; adult/child £2/1.20; 🕑 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct) to see its reproduction of an enormous panorama of Louth, which was painted from the top of the church's tower in the 19th century and makes a fascinating comparison to today's view.

With that image burnt into your retina, head for the spire itself. The part medieval, part Tudor **St James' Church** (🕑 10.30am-4pm Easter-Christmas) was described by Sir John Betjeman as 'one of the last great medieval Gothic masterpieces' and is propped up by dramatic buttresses and fortified by battlements. Inside, take a good look down the nave and you'll see that the left row of pillars – which are older than their opposite twins – are lurching off balance. Strange to think that the famous New World adventurer Captain John Smith (yes, the one in *Pocahontas*) once worshipped here. A long elbow-scraping climb up to the tower (£1) is rewarded by views better still than you'd hoped.

Louth's most elegant street is Georgian Westgate, which runs from beside the church.

Sleeping & Eating

our pick **Priory** (☎ 602930; www.theprioryhotel.com; 149 Eastgate; s/d/f from £45/60/110; 🅿 ⊠) Half-castle, half-house but never a priory, this glorious whitewashed Gothic-style building from 1818 is set in sprawling gardens complete with folly and lake. The formidable task of its upkeep has been taken on by a passionate young family, and the rooms have beautiful period-style furnishings. Dinner is available most nights, and children are very welcome.

Getting There & Away

Louth is 23 miles northeast of Lincoln, from where bus 10 runs every couple of hours (one hour).

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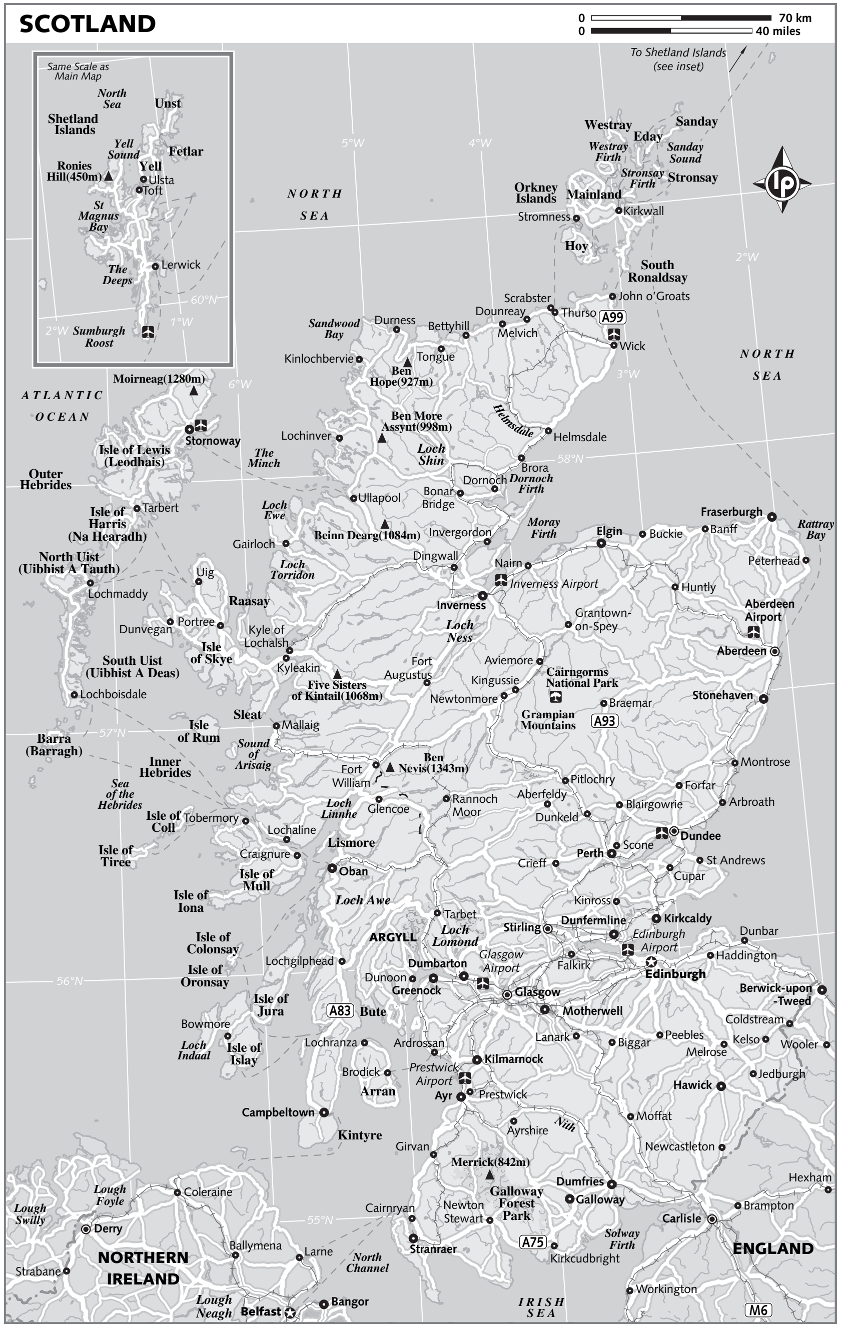
Scotland

GRAEME CORNWALLIS


SCOTLAND
0 70 km
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To Shetland Islands (see inset)
Same Scale as Main Map
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Ronies Hill(450m)
St Magnus Bay
The Deeps
Sumburgh Roost
Orkney Islands
Westray
Eday
Sanday
Stronsay
Mainland
Kirkwall
Stromness
Hoy
South Ronaldsay
John o'Groats
Thurso
Wick
NORTH SEA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Outer Hebrides
Isle of Lewis (Leodhais)
Stornoway
Isle of Harris (Na Hearadh)
North Uist (Uibhist A Tuath)
South Uist (Uibhist A Deas)
Barra (Barragh)
Isle of Skye
Portree
Ullapool
Inverness
Loch Ness
Fort William
Ben Nevis(1343m)
Cairngorms National Park
Aberdeen
Dundee
Perth
Stirling
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Oban
Isle of Mull
Isle of Islay
Arran
Kintyre
Ayr
Dumfries
Stranraer
Carlisle
ENGLAND
NORTHERN IRELAND
Belfast
Derry
IRISH SEA
North Channel

Edinburgh

Rising from the medieval muck of the Old Town, Edinburgh (pronounced *ed*-inbra) became respectable with the corseted grid of the New Town and has proven to be Scotland's most significant city throughout history. It's the older and, with the seat of government here, bossier sister to Glasgow, and the two cities have enjoyed a sibling rivalry that has Glaswegians sneering that Edinburgh is 'No' real Scotland'. But she's a cosmopolitan miss, hosting royalty from the dreaded south as often as Scottish kings in her long history, with every other building wearing a royal tag. While Glasgow got its hands dirty with shipbuilding and the tobacco trade, Edinburgh went to university with the Scottish Enlightenment and became one of the most sophisticated cities in the world.

Edinburgh's real charm is in her petite size, with much of the city centre lined between the castle that tops a volcanic crag, and the magnificent Arthur's Seat. While the random development of Princes St has caused many to scoff – newspapers rail against it as too trashily commercial, or not commercial enough with too many historical buildings preserved – the city's beauty has certainly endured. In August Edinburgh blooms with art at its ever-changing festivals that promise everything from stand-up comedy to sit-in installation art.

The city wears the mantle of capital casually, with a parliament that respectfully sinks into the ground next to stately Holyroodhouse. At the other end of the Royal Mile, however, the defiant symbol of Edinburgh Castle dominates a tough knuckle of land, reminding you from anywhere in the city that this proud old girl has never been a princess and can always put up a fight when she needs to.

HIGHLIGHTS

Edinburgh ★
★ Rosslyn

- Pondering the organic aesthetic of the **Scottish Parliament** (p756) and wondering what all the financial fuss was about
- Catching your breath at the top of **Arthur's Seat** (p756) only to have it taken away again by the views
- Discovering the new **Scottish cuisine** (p765) that's got foodies heading north of the border for fresh seafood and game
- Holding your ears for the booming One O'Clock Gun that makes you notice the majestic **Edinburgh Castle** (p752) wherever you are in the city
- Re-creating the final scenes of *The Da Vinci Code* at the fascinating **Rosslyn Chapel** (p772)
- Sampling some of Scotland's best dining with the equally stunning views and menus at the **Tower** (p765)

- TELEPHONE CODE: 0131
- POPULATION: 430,000

HISTORY

Edinburgh grew up in the 11th century with the development of markets at the foot of the fortress, and from 1124 King David I held court at the castle and founded the abbey at Holyrood. The first effective town wall was constructed around 1450 and circled the Old Town and the Grassmarket. This well-defended zone became a medieval Manhattan, forcing densely packed inhabitants to build tenements that soared to 12 storeys.

The city played an important role in the Reformation, led by the firebrand John Knox, but later, when James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English crown in 1603, he moved the court to London. Edinburgh's importance waned, to be further reduced by the Act of Union in 1707.

Nonetheless, cultural and intellectual life flourished; during the Scottish Enlightenment (about 1740–1830) Edinburgh became known as 'a hotbed of genius'. In the second half of the 18th century a new city was created across the ravine to the north, and the population soon exploded. A new ring of crescents and circuses was built south of the New Town, and grey Victorian terraces sprang up. In the 20th century the poor that occupied the Old Town were moved into new housing estates further out – estates that now experience severe social problems.

A history of separatist feelings meant Scottish devolution was always on the cards. After a successful referendum held by the newly elected Labour Party in 1997, the first Scottish parliament since 1707 was convened in Edinburgh, a capital once more, on 12 May 1999. Under the leadership of Donald Dewar (1937–2000), who became the First Minister, the Labour Party formed a government in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The Scottish National Party (SNP), with about 30% of the vote, became the second-largest party and de facto opposition, its biggest political success. Current First Minister, Jack McConnell, presided over the opening of the new Scottish Parliament building in 2004, but more recently garnered press attention for saying he'd support Trinidad and Tobago against England in the 2006 World Cup.

ORIENTATION

The city's most obvious landmarks are Arthur's Seat, southeast of the centre, and Edinburgh Castle at the western end of the Old Town. The Old and New Towns are separated by Princes Street Gardens.

EDINBURGH IN…

Two Days

Your first stop should be the **Old Town** (p752) for a wander up and down the history lesson of the **Royal Mile** (p752) to the **castle** (p752), hopefully beating the tour buses there. Walk back down the Royal Mile, lunch-bound, and turn right on to George IV Bridge. If you're hungry, **Maison Bleue** (p765) is just around the corner; for something lighter, the **Elephant House** (p764) will trumpet a welcome. Head back down the Royal Mile to check out **Holyroodhouse** (p756) and the **Scottish Parliament** (p756). In the evening, scare yourself with a guided walk by **Mercat Tours** (p761) or get your required reading done with a **literary pub crawl** (p761). Head across town for dinner at unpretentious **Fenwick's** (p765) and if you're still thirsty pop into **Borough** (p767).

In the morning, chase your hangover-beating **Irn Bru** (see p767) with the clean air of an ascent of **Arthur's Seat** (p756). Next, give the credit card some exercise by patrolling **Princes Street** (p769), stopping at the **Café Royal Circle Bar** (p767) for refreshment, if it's a nice day. Then head down to Leith – see the **royal yacht Britannia** (p759), and finish off your day with dinner at the **Vintners Room** (p766).

Four Days

Your third morning could be spent – depending on the weather – at either the **Royal Botanic Garden** (p759) or in the **National Gallery of Scotland** (p758) checking out what landscapes you're missing out on. From here, lunch in cobbled **Stockbridge** (p766) isn't too far away. An afternoon stroll up **Calton Hill** (p758) beckons, but then there's the beer garden at **Pear Tree House** (p767), and finally good-value eateries such as the **Forest** (p764)

On the fourth day, head to **Rosslyn Chapel** (p772), most enigmatic of buildings, or head out to **Craigmillar Castle** (p772), a sweet castle that's peaceful after busy Edinburgh. Top off your stay by sampling moreish comfort food at either **Monster Mash** (p766) or **L'Alba D'Oro** (p766).

Edinburgh's main shopping street, Princes St, runs along the northern side of the gardens. At the garden's eastern end, Calton Hill is crowned by several monuments. The Royal Mile (Lawnmarket, High St and Canongate), the parallel equivalent in the Old Town, is roughly bookended by the Palace of Holyroodhouse to the east and the unmissable castle to the west.

See p771 for details on getting to/from the airport.

Maps

Lonely Planet publishes the *Edinburgh City Map*, with an index of streets and sights. Another useful, portable map with street index is the *Collins Central Edinburgh Street Atlas*, available at most bookshops and tourist offices.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Blackwell (Map pp754-5; ☎ 622 8222; www.blackwell.co.uk; 53 South Bridge; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9.30am-8pm Tue, 9am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun)

Waterstone's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 2666; www.waterstones.co.uk; 128 Princes St; 🕒 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-7pm Sun) The largest Edinburgh branch.

Emergency

Dial ☎ 999 or ☎ 112 for police, ambulance, fire brigade or coastguard.

Internet Access

As well as the places listed here, most hostels have a terminal, as do several cafés and libraries, and the tourist office.

Bytes & Slices (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 8887; 2 Waverley Steps; per hr £3; 🕒 8am-9pm) Near the train station, down the steps next to the Balmoral Hotel.

e-corner (Map pp754-5; ☎ 558 7858; 55 Blackfriars St; per hr £1.80; 🕒 7.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun)

easyInternetcafé (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 3580; 58 Rose St; per hr £2, day pass £3.50; 🕒 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) Loads of machines, but little support and no access to USB ports.

Internet Café (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 5400; 98 West Bow; per hr £2; 🕒 10am-11pm)

Wired (Map pp750-1; www.wiredcafe.info; per hr £1.50; 🕒 9am-6pm) South Clerk St (☎ 667 9783; 27 South Clerk St) Brougham Pl (☎ 659 7820; 1 Brougham Pl)

Internet Resources

City of Edinburgh Council (www.edinburgh.gov.uk) Has an events guide.

Edinburgh Guide (www.edinburghguide.com) Theatre, film and events listings, plus a directory of useful links.

Laundry

Most of the backpacker hostels have a good-value laundry service. Otherwise, try **Ace Cleaning Centre** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 667 0549; 13 S Clerk St; around £5 per load; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun).

Left Luggage

Edinburgh airport left-luggage office (per item per 24hr £3; 🕒 5am-11pm) On the ground floor.

St Andrew Square bus and coach station lockers (Map pp754-5; small/medium/large locker per 24hr £3/4/5; 🕒 6am-midnight)

Waverley train station left-luggage office (Map pp754-5; per item per 24hr £5; 🕒 7am-11pm) Beside platform 1.

Libraries

Central Library (Map pp754-5; ☎ 242 8000; George IV Bridge; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Has free internet access.

Medical Services

Royal Infirmary (☎ 536 1000; Little France, Old Dalkeith Rd) Has 24-hour emergency.

Money

There are numerous banks with ATMs throughout the city, particularly around St Andrew Sq and George St. There's a bureau de change in the Edinburgh & Scotland Information Centre (ESIC), but post offices, banks and **Amex** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 718 2501; 69 George St) have better rates.

Post

Main post office (Map pp754-5; ☎ 0845 722 3344; St James Centre, Leith St)

Tourist Information

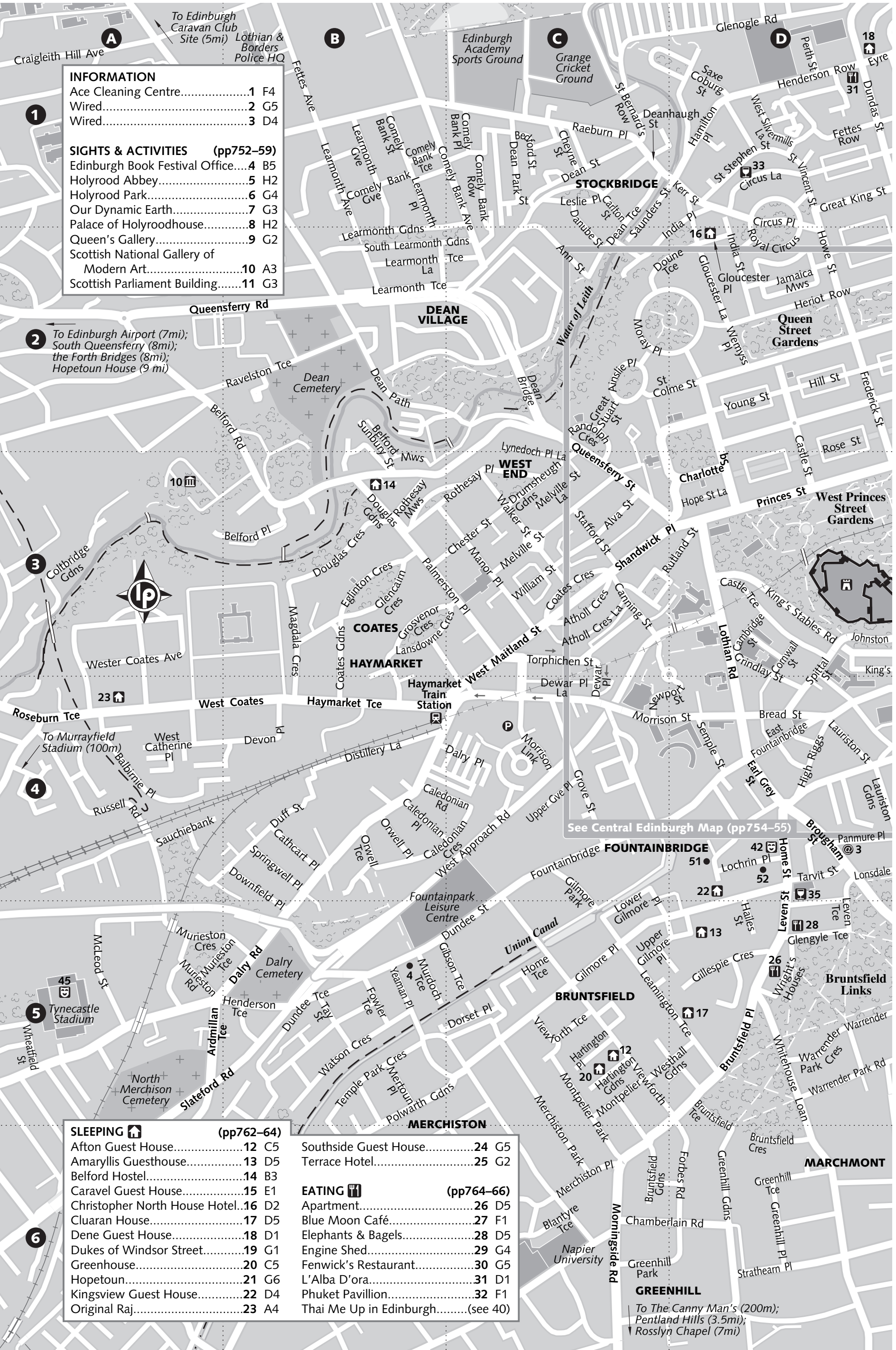
Edinburgh & Scotland Information Centre (ESIC; Map pp754-5; ☎ 0845 225 5121; www.edinburgh.org; 3 Princes St; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Wed, to 6pm Thu-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Oct-Apr) Does currency exchange, internet access and tour and bus tickets.

Tourist Information Desk (Edinburgh Airport; 🕒 6.30am-10.30pm) Near international arrivals.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 7747; www.statravel.co.uk; 27 Forrest Rd; 🕒 Mon-Sat)

Student Flights (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 6868; www.studentflights.co.uk; 53 Forrest Rd; 🕒 Mon-Sat)


A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
6
To Edinburgh Caravan Club Site (5mi)
Lothian & Borders Police HQ
Craigleith Hill Ave
Edinburgh Academy Sports Ground
Grange Cricket Ground
Glenogle Rd
Henderson Row
Eyre Pl
Dundas St
Fettes Row
Fettes Ave
Raeburn Pl
Deanhaugh St
St Bernard's Row
Saxe Coburg St
Hamilton Pl
West Silvermills La
St Stephen St
Circus La
St Vincent St
Great King St
Circus Pl
Royal Circus
STOCKBRIDGE
Dean St
Cheyne St
Leslie Pl
Carlton St
Dean Tce
Saunders St
Kerr St
India Pl
Danube St
Learmonth Gdns
South Learmonth Gdns
Learmonth Tce
Learmonth Gve
Comely Bank
Comely Bank Ave
Comely Bank Row
Comely Bank St
Dean Park St
Ann St
Doune Tce
Gloucester Pl
Gloucester La
Jamaica Mws
Heriot Row
Queen Street Gardens
Queensferry Rd
DEAN VILLAGE
Water of Leith
Dean Bridge
Moray Pl
Ainslie Pl
St Colme St
Young St
Hill St
Frederick St
Castle St
Rose St
Charlotte Sq
Hope St La
Princes St
West Princes Street Gardens
To Edinburgh Airport (7mi); South Queensferry (8mi); the Forth Bridges (8mi); Hopetoun House (9 mi)
Ravelston Tce
Dean Cemetery
Dean Path
Belford Rd
Belford Mws
Sunbury St
Lynedoch Pl La
Randolph Cres
Great Stuart St
Queensferry St
WEST END
Drumsheugh Gdns
Melville St
Rothesay Pl
Rothesay Mws
Douglas Gdns
Belford Pl
Chester St
Walker St
Manor Pl
William St
Stafford St
Alva St
Shandwick Pl
Rutland St
Coltbridge Gdns
Douglas Cres
Eglinton Cres
Glencairn Cres
Grosvenor Cres
Lansdowne Cres
Palmerston Pl
Coates Cres
Atholl Cres
Atholl Cres La
Canning St
Castle Tce
King's Stables Rd
Johnston Tce
Cambridge St
Grindlay St
Cornwall St
Lothian Rd
Spittal St
King's
Wester Coates Ave
COATES
HAYMARKET
Magdala Cres
Coates Gdns
West Maitland St
Torphichen St
Dewar Pl La
Dewar Pl
Haymarket Train Station
Roseburn Tce
West Coates
Haymarket Tce
Newport St
Morrison St
Bread St
East Fountainbridge
Lauriston St
High Riggs
Semple St
Earl Grey St
Lauriston Gdns
To Murrayfield Stadium (100m)
West Catherine Pl
Devon Pl
Distillery La
Dalry Pl
Morrison Link
Grove St
Balbirnie Pl
Russell Rd
Sauchiebank
Duff St
Cathcart Pl
Springwell Pl
Downfield Pl
Caledonian Rd
Caledonian Pl
Caledonian Cres
Orwell Pl
Orwell Tce
West Approach Rd
Upper Grove Pl
See Central Edinburgh Map (pp754–55)
FOUNTAINBRIDGE
Fountainbridge
Gilmore Park
Lower Gilmore Pl
Lochrin Pl
Home St
Tarvit St
Brougham St
Panmure Pl
Lonsdale Tce
Leven St
Leven Tce
Glengyle Tce
Fountainpark Leisure Centre
Dundee St
Union Canal
Murieston Cres
Murieston Tce
Murieston Rd
Dalry Rd
Dalry Cemetery
Henderson Tce
Ardmillan Tce
Dundee Tce
Tay St
Fowler Tce
Yeaman Pl
Murdoch Tce
Gibson Tce
Home Tce
Gilmore Pl
Upper Gilmore Pl
Leamington Tce
Hailes St
Gillespie Cres
Wright's Houses
Bruntsfield Links
McLeod St
Tynecastle Stadium
Wheatfield St
North Merchiston Cemetery
Slateford Rd
Watson Cres
Temple Park Cres
Merton Pl
Dorset Pl
Polwarth Gdns
BRUNTSFIELD
Viewforth Tce
Harrington Pl
Harrington Gdns
Montpelier
Montpelier Park
Viewforth
Westhall Gdns
Bruntsfield Pl
Whitehouse Loan
Warrender Park Cres
Warrender Park Rd
Warrender
MERCHISTON
Merchiston Park
Merchiston Pl
Blantyre Tce
Napier University
Morningside Rd
Bruntsfield Gdns
Forbes Rd
Chamberlain Rd
Greenhill Gdns
Greenhill Park
Greenhill Tce
Greenhill Pl
Bruntsfield Cres
Strathearn Pl
MARCHMONT
GREENHILL
To The Canny Man's (200m); Pentland Hills (3.5mi); Rosslyn Chapel (7mi)

INFORMATION

Ace Cleaning Centre	1	F4
Wired	2	G5
Wired	3	D4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp752–59)

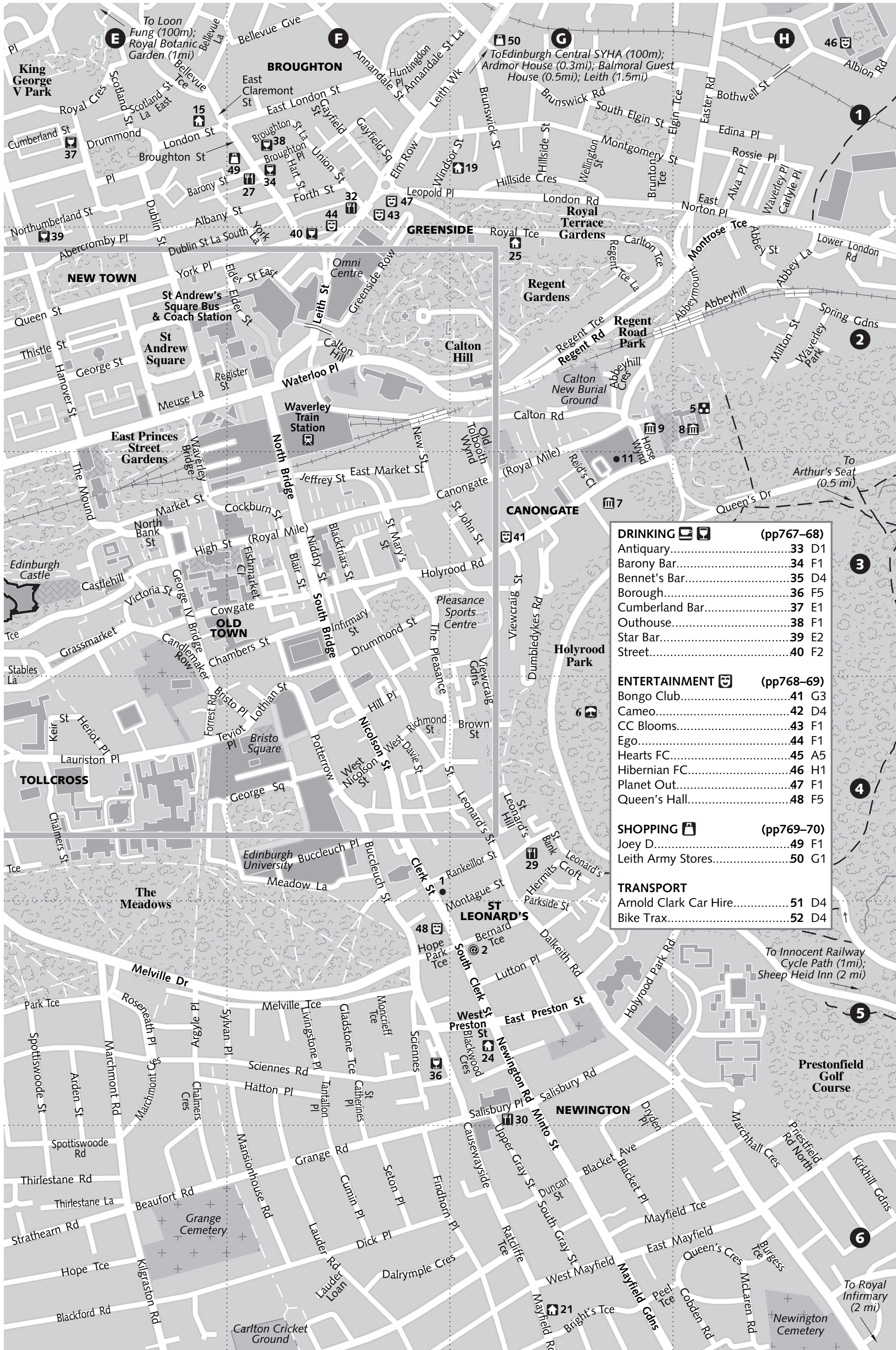
Edinburgh Book Festival Office	4	B5
Holyrood Abbey	5	H2
Holyrood Park	6	G4
Our Dynamic Earth	7	G3
Palace of Holyroodhouse	8	H2
Queen's Gallery	9	G2
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art	10	A3
Scottish Parliament Building	11	G3

SLEEPING (pp762–64)

Afton Guest House	12	C5
Amaryllis Guesthouse	13	D5
Belford Hostel	14	B3
Caravel Guest House	15	E1
Christopher North House Hotel	16	D2
Cluaran House	17	D5
Dene Guest House	18	D1
Dukes of Windsor Street	19	G1
Greenhouse	20	C5
Hopetoun	21	G6
Kingsview Guest House	22	D4
Original Raj	23	A4
Southside Guest House	24	G5
Terrace Hotel	25	G2

EATING (pp764–66)

Apartment	26	D5
Blue Moon Café	27	F1
Elephants & Bagels	28	D5
Engine Shed	29	G4
Fenwick's Restaurant	30	G5
L'Alba D'ora	31	D1
Phuket Pavillion	32	F1
Thai Me Up in Edinburgh	(see 40)	


0 200 m
0 0.1 miles
E
F
G
H
1
2
3
4
5
6
To Loon Fung (100m); Royal Botanic Garden (1mi)
Bellevue Gve
Bellevue La
Bellevue Tce
King George V Park
BROUGHTON
East Claremont St
East London St
Royal Cres
Scotland St
Scotland St La East
Cumberland St
Drummond Pl
London St
Broughton St
Broughton St La
Broughton Pl
Hart St
Union St
Gayfield Sq
Forth St
Barony St
Albany St
Dublin St
Dublin St La South
Northumberland St
Abercromby Pl
York Pl
Annandale St
Huntingdon Pl
Annandale St La
Leith Wk
Elm Row
Windsor St
Brunswick St
Brunswick Rd
Hillside Cres
Hillside St
Wellington St
Leopold Pl
London Rd
GREENSIDE
Royal Tce
Royal Terrace Gardens
To Edinburgh Central SYHA (100m); Ardmor House (0.3mi); Balmoral Guest House (0.5mi); Leith (1.5mi)
South Elgin St
Elgin Tce
Easter Rd
Bothwell St
Edina Pl
Rossie Pl
Montgomery St
Brunton Tce
East Norton Pl
Alva Pl
Waverley Pl
Carlyle Pl
Albion Rd
Carlton Tce
Montrose Tce
Abbey St
Lower London Rd
Abbey La
Spring Gdns
Regent Gardens
Regent Tce La
Regent Road Park
Abbeymount
Abbeyhill
Regent Tce
Regent Rd
NEW TOWN
Queen St
Thistle St
Hanover St
George St
St Andrew's Square Bus & Coach Station
St Andrew Square
Register Pl
Elder St
Elder St East
Leith St
Omni Centre
Greenside Row
Calton Hill
Waterloo Pl
Calton New Burial Ground
Abbeyhill Cres
Milton St
Waverley Park
Meuse La
Waverley Train Station
Calton Rd
East Princes Street Gardens
Waverley Bridge
North Bridge
New St
Old Tolbooth Wynd
Jeffrey St
East Market St
Canongate
(Royal Mile)
Reid's Cl
Horse Wynd
To Arthur's Seat (0.5 mi)
Queen's Dr
CANONGATE
The Mound
Market St
Cockburn St
North Bank St
High St
(Royal Mile)
Fishmarket Cl
Niddry St
Blackfriars St
St Mary's St
St John St
Holyrood Rd
Edinburgh Castle
Castlehill
Victoria St
George IV Bridge
Cowgate
Blair St
South Bridge
Pleasance Sports Centre
Viewcraig St
Dumbiedykes Rd
Holyrood Park
Johnston Tce
Grassmarket
OLD TOWN
Infirmary St
Drummond St
The Pleasance
Viewcraig Gdns
Stables La
Candlemaker Row
Chambers St
Keir St
Heriot Pl
Forrest Rd
Bristo Pl
Lothian St
Teviot Pl
Bristo Square
Potterrow
West Nicolson St
Nicolson St
Hill Pl
Richmond Pl
West Richmond St
Davie St
Brown St
Lauriston Pl
TOLLCROSS
George Sq
St Leonard's St
St Leonard's Hill
St Leonard's Bank
St Leonard's Crag
Chalmers St
Edinburgh University
Buccleuch Pl
Buccleuch St
Meadow La
Clerk St
Rankeillor St
Montague St
Hermits Croft
Parkside St
The Meadows
ST LEONARD'S
Hope Park Tce
Bernard Tce
Dalkeith Rd
Holyrood Park Rd
To Innocent Railway Cycle Path (1mi); Sheep Heid Inn (2 mi)
Melville Dr
Park Tce
Rosebery Pl
Argyle Pl
Sylvan Pl
Melville Tce
Livingstone Pl
Gladstone Tce
Moncrieff Tce
Sciennes
South Clerk St
Lutton Pl
West Preston St
East Preston St
Blackwood Cres
Newington Rd
Spottiswoode St
Arden St
Marchmont Rd
Marchmont Cres
Sciennes Rd
Tantallon Pl
St Catherine's Pl
Hatton Pl
Chalmers Cres
Salisbury Pl
Minto St
Salisbury Rd
NEWINGTON
Dryden Pl
Prestonfield Golf Course
Spottiswoode Rd
Thirlestane Rd
Thirlestane La
Mansionhouse Rd
Grange Rd
Cumin Pl
Seton Pl
Findhorn Pl
Causewayside
Upper Gray St
Duncan St
Blacket Ave
Blacket Pl
Marchhall Cres
Priestfield Rd North
Kirkhill Gdns
Strathearn Rd
Beaufort Rd
Grange Cemetery
Lauder Rd
Dick Pl
Ratcliffe Tce
South Gray St
Mayfield Tce
East Mayfield
Queen's Cres
Burgess Tce
Hope Tce
Dalrymple Cres
West Mayfield
Mayfield Gdns
Peel Tce
Cobden Rd
McLaren Rd
To Royal Infirmary (2 mi)
Blackford Rd
Kilgraston Rd
Lauder Loan
Mayfield Rd
Bright's Tce
Carlton Cricket Ground
Newington Cemetery

DRINKING (pp767–68)

Antiquary	33	D1
Barony Bar	34	F1
Bennet's Bar	35	D4
Borough	36	F5
Cumberland Bar	37	E1
Outhouse	38	F1
Star Bar	39	E2
Street	40	F2

ENTERTAINMENT (pp768–69)

Bongo Club	41	G3
Cameo	42	D4
CC Blooms	43	F1
Ego	44	F1
Hearts FC	45	A5
Hibernian FC	46	H1
Planet Out	47	F1
Queen's Hall	48	F5

SHOPPING (pp769–70)

Joey D	49	F1
Leith Army Stores	50	G1

TRANSPORT

Arnold Clark Car Hire	51	D4
Bike Trax	52	D4

SIGHTS

Many of Edinburgh's must-sees are concentrated around the Old Town, the focus of which is the Royal Mile, and, north of here across a deep valley, the New Town, with its elegant and well-ordered streets.

Old Town

EDINBURGH CASTLE

Dug into an extinct black volcano, **Edinburgh Castle** (HS; Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 9846; Castlehill; adult/child £9.80/3.50; ⏰ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar; ♿) lords it over Scotland's capital and is an icon of Scottish nationhood. Its grey magnificence is visible from nearly every part of the city, and it makes its presence felt when the One O'Clock Gun booms from the battlements.

The castle is the heart of Edinburgh. The commanding and inaccessible position was fortified from prehistoric times for its obvious strategic advantage, and has been crucial in the struggles between Scotland and the 'auld enemy' south of the border. Captured by the English during the Wars of Independence (1174–1356), the castle was razed by Robert the Bruce as part of his scorched earth retreat. Edward III and David II both took turns at rebuilding. Aside from the ruins of David's Tower, little of this work survives; strengthening and renovation of the castle continued into the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The castle last saw military action in 1745, but it served as the British army's main base in Scotland until the 1920s.

Inside, the most interesting sights include: the **Stone of Destiny** (p757); **St Margaret's Chapel** (the oldest building in Edinburgh), a simple stone building probably built by David I or Alexander I around 1130 in memory of their mother; the **palace** (including the Scottish Crown Jewels); and the **National War Museum of Scotland** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 7534; admission incl in Edinburgh Castle ticket; ⏰ 9.45am-5.30pm Apr-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Mar), a good account of how war and military service have shaped the nation.

During the Edinburgh Festival, the castle forecourt becomes a grandstand for the Edinburgh Military Tattoo. The castle is especially busy then, but throughout the year it's worth visiting early in the morning or late in the afternoon to avoid the peak periods.

ROYAL MILE

Running along the ridge from Edinburgh Castle to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the rough cobbles of the **Royal Mile** make up one of the world's most romantic streets. Closes (entrances) and wynds (lanes) seduce you down either side for deeper explorations. Sure, there are tacky souvenir shops and tourist crowds, but when the rain lashes down and tourists flee into the pubs, the street feels like it hasn't changed for a thousand years. Between the royal flush at either end, there's a deck of exceptional buildings shuffling through history since the 15th century in the shape of museums and pubs, while during the festival it plays the joker with rough-and-tumble street theatre.

Elegant tenement buildings once housed all manner of Edinburgh society in an unhygienic bedlam that earned the medieval metropolis its 'Auld Reekie' nickname. Underneath, the poor lived as best they could in a warren of vaults and cellars, some of which can be visited on spooky night tours (see p761).

At the top of the Royal Mile, the **Camera Obscura** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 3709; Outlook Tower, Castlehill; adult/child £6.45/4.15; ⏰ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) offers great views over the city from inside the Outlook Tower. It was originally a Victorian curiosity, whereby a system of mirrors and lenses projects a colour image of the city onto a white table. On the way up the stairs there's an intriguing display of holograms and optical illusions: the whole visit offers plenty of charm.

Further down the hill, the **Highland Tolbooth Kirk**, with its 73m spire, is an icon of the city's skyline. It was built in the 1840s by James Graham and Augustus Pugin (one of the architects of London's Houses of Parliament) and contains the Hub ticket centre (see p761).

A characteristic Old Town tenement building, **Gladstone's Land** (NTS; Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 5856; 477 Lawnmarket; adult/child £5/4; ⏰ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct) is a fascinating glimpse into the past. The narrow, six-storey house was built in the mid-16th century and extended around 1617 by wealthy merchant Thomas Gledstanes. The best room is the Painted Chamber with its fabulous painted roof, dating back to 1620, and ornate oak furniture. One of the oldest surviving tenements is the **John Knox House** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 9579; 43-45 High St; adult/child £3/2; ⏰ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat), a classic structure built in 1490 and probable home of the father of the Scottish Reformation, John Knox.

Nearby, tucked in a close, the **Writers' Museum** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 529 4901; Lady Stair's Close, Lawnmarket; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, noon-5pm Sun Aug) is housed in **Lady Stair's House** (built in 1622) and contains manuscripts and memorabilia from Scotland's big three literati: Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Parliament Square, largely filled by St Giles Cathedral, is on High St, the middle segment of the Royal Mile. This was the heart of Edinburgh until the 18th century, and a cobblestoned **Heart of Midlothian** is set in the ground. Passers-by traditionally spit on it for luck.

The 19th-century **Mercat Cross** replaced the original 1365 cross, marking the spot where merchants and traders transacted business and royal proclamations were read.

Looming over High St, **St Giles Cathedral** (Map pp754-5; High St; admission free, donations encouraged; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Oct-Apr, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 1-7pm Sun May-Sep) has giant stained-glass windows providing a kaleidoscope of colour (even on a dull day), and rows of hexagonal columns and crowning arches crisscrossing their way along the length of the building.

Inside is a **statue of John Knox**, minister from 1559 to 1572; he preached his uncompromising Calvinist message and launched the Scottish Reformation from here. The new austerity this ushered in led to changes in the building's interior – decorations, altars and the relics of St Giles were thrown into the Nor Loch, a lake-cum-cesspit that fostered disease where Princes Street Gardens and Waverley train station now stand.

The **Real Mary King's Close** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 0870 243 0160; 2 Warriston's Close; adult/child £8/6; ⏰ 9am-9pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sun-Fri & 10am-9pm Sat Nov-Mar) penetrates the underground world beneath the Old Town. The spooky visit is accompanied by costumed characters who retell their life stories. The grimmest is a man whose job was burying plague victims.

The Royal Mile continues below High St as Canongate. A fine example of 16th-century architecture, **Canongate Tolbooth** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 529 4057; 163 Canongate; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, 2-5pm Sun Aug) has picturesque turrets and a projecting clock. It served in turn as a collection point for tolls, a council house, a courtroom and a jail. It now houses

AULD READIE: A LITERARY LOOK AROUND EDINBURGH

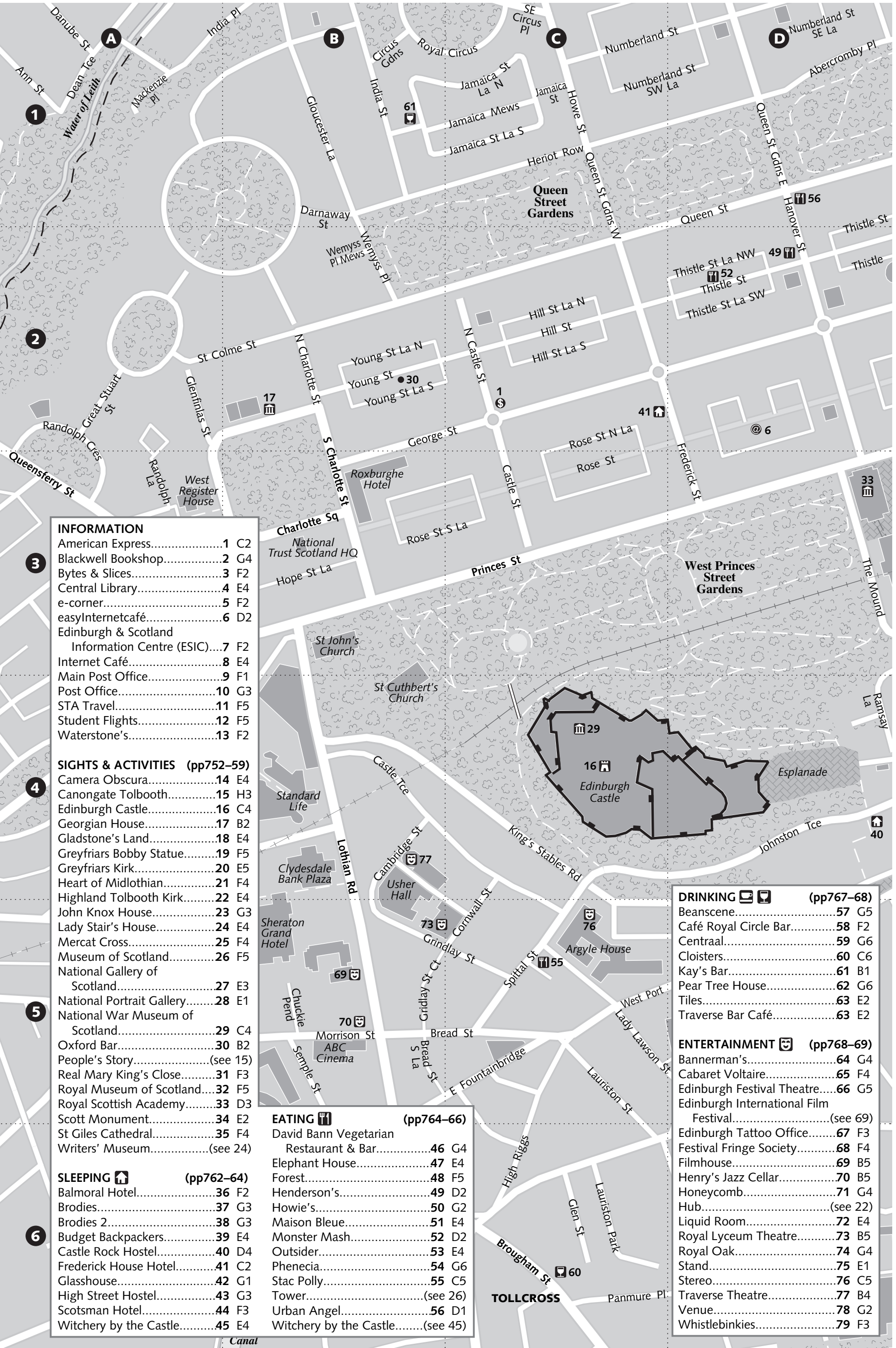
Ever the leading literary light of the north, Edinburgh has produced more than its fair share of writers. Many speculate that it's the wet weather that keeps them inside scribbling, but whatever the reason, the city is packed with literary destinations.

Any tour of the city's should start at the Writers' Museum (opposite), which covers Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. Downstairs there's a cabinet made by Deacon Brodie, a nefarious character whose life informed Stevenson's work. A mild-mannered cabinetmaker by day, Brodie had a double life that saw him in brothels and gambling dens most nights. To pay off his debts he took on a nocturnal life of crime, robbing around town for two years before being caught plundering the General Excise Office. According to local legend, ironically he ended up being hanged on a gallows that he'd designed and built. Stevenson was fascinated with the tale, writing a play, *Deacon Brodie or the Double Life* (1880), and later pursuing the idea of dual identities in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

Stevenson was just one of a number of graduates of Edinburgh University to pen novels. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, commemorated with a statue of the most famous proponent of the deerstalker hat, was a classmate of Stevenson. Many believe that Doyle based Sherlock Holmes on a university lecturer, Dr Joseph Bell, who encouraged keen observation as a way of diagnosing patients and may even have muttered 'It was elementary' to explain his more brilliant pieces of medicine.

Recently another writer looked to Edinburgh for inspiration. A divorced single mum sat drinking coffee in the Elephant House café (p764) and while her daughter slept wrote a manuscript that must have been inspired by Edinburgh's magical castle. In 2005 JK Rowling would return the compliment to the city with a packed reading of her *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* book from Edinburgh Castle (opposite).

Less fantastic, the hard-boiled writer Ian Rankin bases his Inspector Rebus novels in Edinburgh: the crime-solver has eaten at Fenwick's (p765) and usually solves his cases in the grungy grandeur of the **Oxford Bar** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 539 7119; 8 Young St; ⏰ 11am-1am Mon-Sat, 12.30pm-1am Sun). Rebus has become so popular that Rankin has written a non-fiction book, *Rebus's Scotland*, in which he follows his own fictional detective around.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C
D
1
2
3
4
5
6
Danube St
Ann St
Dean Tce
Water of Leith
Mackenzie Pl
India Pl
Circus Gdns
Royal Circus
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Jamaica St La N
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Darnaway St
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Randolph Cres
George St
Rose St N La
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Frederick St
Queensferry St
Randolph La
West Register House
S Charlotte St
Roxburghe Hotel
Castle St
Charlotte Sq
National Trust Scotland HQ
Rose St S La
Princes St
Hope St La
West Princes Street Gardens
The Mound
St John's Church
St Cuthbert's Church
Ramsay La
Edinburgh Castle
Esplanade
Castle Tce
Standard Life
King's Stables Rd
Johnston Tce
Lothian Rd
Clydesdale Bank Plaza
Cambridge St
Usher Hall
Cornwall St
Grindlay St
Sheraton Grand Hotel
Argyle House
Spittal St
Gridlay St Cl
West Port
Chuckie Pend
Morrison St
ABC Cinema
Bread St
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Lady Lawson St
Semple St
Lauriston St
High Riggs
Glen St
Lauriston Park
Brougham St
TOLLCROSS
Panmure Pl
Canal
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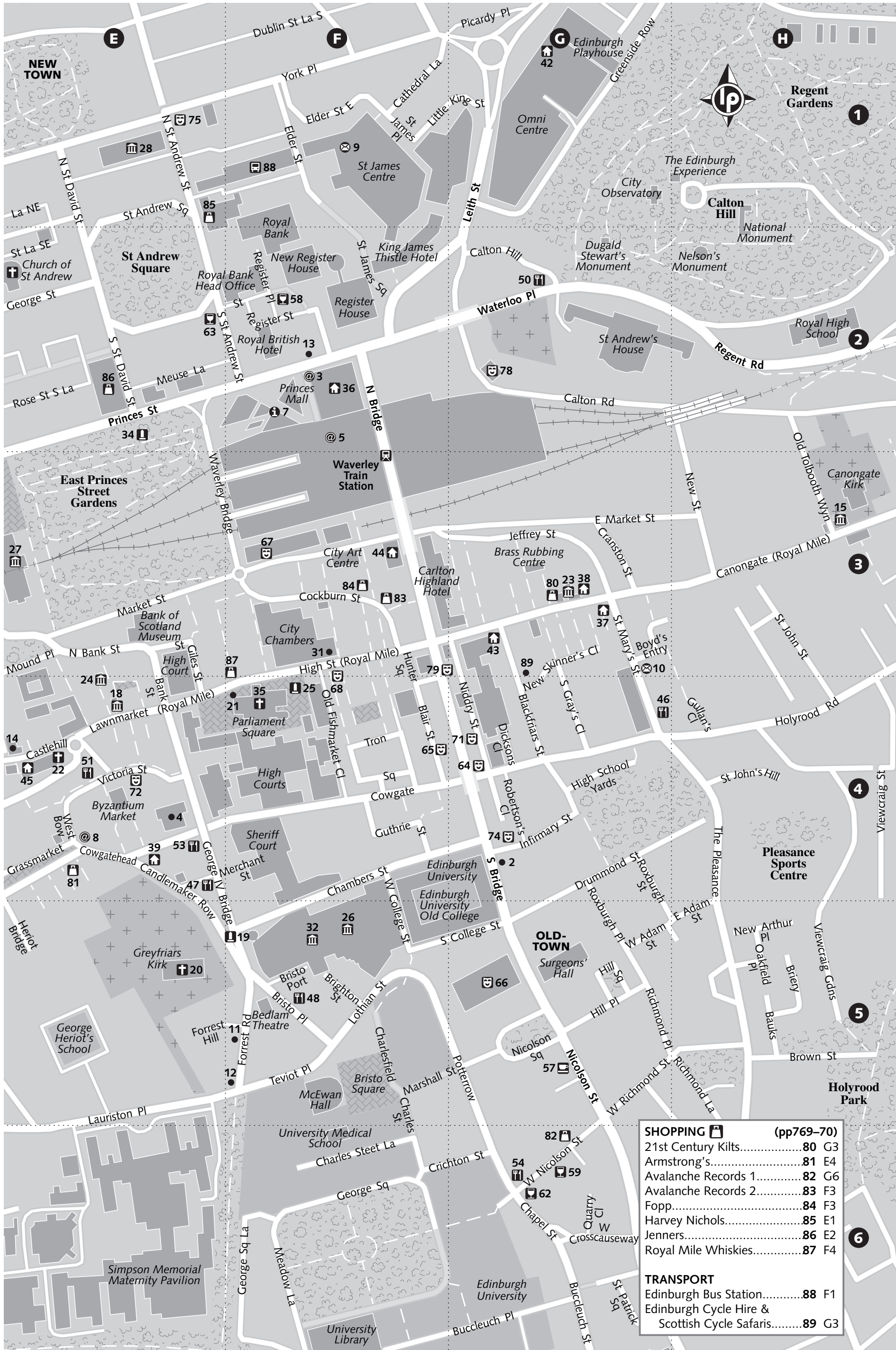
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NEW TOWN
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York Pl
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Elder St E
Little King St
St James Pl
Omni Centre
Regent Gardens
N St Andrew St
Elder St
St James Centre
The Edinburgh Experience
City Observatory
Calton Hill
National Monument
N St David St
La NE
St Andrew Sq
Royal Bank
Leith St
St La SE
Church of St Andrew
St Andrew Square
New Register House
King James Thistle Hotel
Royal Bank Head Office
Register Pl
St James Sq
Calton Hill
Dugald Stewart's Monument
Nelson's Monument
George St
Register House
Waterloo Pl
Register St
Royal British Hotel
Royal High School
St Andrew's House
Regent Rd
S St Andrew St
S St David St
Meuse La
Rose St S La
Princes St
Princes Mall
N Bridge
Calton Rd
East Princes Street Gardens
Waverley Bridge
Waverley Train Station
New St
Old Tolbooth Wyn
Canongate Kirk
E Market St
Jeffrey St
Brass Rubbing Centre
Cranston St
City Art Centre
Carlton Highland Hotel
Canongate (Royal Mile)
Market St
Cockburn St
Bank of Scotland Museum
City Chambers
St Mary's St
Boyd's Entry
St John St
Mound Pl
N Bank St
High Court
St Giles St
High St (Royal Mile)
Hunter Sq
New Skinner's Cl
Bank St
Parliament Square
Old Fishmarket Cl
Niddry St
Blackfriars St
S Gray's Cl
Gullan's Cl
Holyrood Rd
Lawnmarket (Royal Mile)
Tron
Blair St
Dicksons Cl
Castlehill
Victoria St
High Courts
Sq
Cowgate
Robertson's Cl
High School Yards
St John's Hill
Viewcraig St
Byzantium Market
Sheriff Court
Guthrie St
Infirmary St
The Pleasance
Pleasance Sports Centre
West Bow
Grassmarket
Cowgatehead
Candlemaker Row
George IV Bridge
Merchant St
Chambers St
Edinburgh University
Edinburgh University Old College
S Bridge
Drummond St
Roxburgh St
E Adam St
Heriot Bridge
Greyfriars Kirk
W College St
S College St
OLD-TOWN
Surgeons' Hall
Roxburgh Pl
W Adam St
New Arthur Pl
Oakfield Pl
Briery
Viewcraig Gdns
Bristo Port
Brighton St
Bristo Pl
Lothian St
Hill Sq
Bedlam Theatre
Hill Pl
Richmond Pl
Baukis
George Heriot's School
Forrest Hill
Forrest Rd
Charlesfield
Nicolson Sq
Brown St
Teviot Pl
Bristo Square
Marshall St
Potterrow
W Richmond St
Richmond La
Holyrood Park
McEwan Hall
Charles St
Nicolson St
Lauriston Pl
University Medical School
Charles Street La
Crichton St
W Nicolson St
George Sq
Quarry Cl
W Crosscauseway
Chapel St
George Sq La
Meadow La
Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion
Edinburgh University
University Library
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21st Century Kilts	80	G3
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an absorbing museum, the **People's Story**, relating the story of the life, work and pastimes of ordinary Edinburgh folk from the late 18th century to the present.

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Built on the site of a former brewery, the **Scottish Parliament** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 348 5000; www.scottish.parliament.uk; Holyrood Rd; admission free, tours adult/concession £3.50/1.75; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun year-round, plus 9am-7pm on days when Parliament is in session, normally Tue-Thu Sep-Jun; ♿) is the newest building in the Old Town, with a curiously organic design that, according to architect Enric Miralles, is about 'sitting in the land' on this strip where other buildings seem to challenge the majesty of Arthur's Seat.

Scots are slowing their complaints about the cost of a project that they feel created an unexceptional building next to great landmarks such as Holyroodhouse, and are starting to appreciate the parliament building on its own merits. The **Canongate Wall** (on the northern side) is studded with stones from across Scotland and inscribed with quotations from Scottish literature. It's well worth taking a tour of the beautifully lit interior, as it will get you access to the upper levels and committee rooms, which offer excellent views.

PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE & HOLYROOD ABBEY

Developed from a guesthouse attached to medieval Holyrood Abbey, the **Palace of Holyroodhouse** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 1096; adult/child £8.80/4.80 not incl Queen's Gallery, adult/child £11/5.50 incl Queen's Gallery; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is the monarch's official residence in Scotland, so you won't be able to visit when the Queen is in town.

The **abbey** (Map pp750–1), founded by David I in 1128, was probably named after a fragment of the cross (*rood* is an old word for cross) said to have belonged to his mother, St Margaret. Most of the surviving ruins date from the 12th and 13th centuries, although a doorway in the far southeastern corner survives from the original Norman church.

James IV extended the abbey guesthouse in 1501; the oldest surviving section of the building, the northwestern tower, was built in 1529 as a royal apartment. Mary Queen of Scots spent six eventful years living in the tower. During this time she married Darnley (in the abbey) and Bothwell (in what is now the Picture Gallery), and this is where she debated with John Knox and witnessed the murder of her secretary (and possible lover) Rizzio. Bonnie Prince Charlie stayed here in 1745 and during the same century France's soon-to-be King Charles X hid out here during the French Revolution. It wasn't until Queen Victoria's reign that British monarchy returned to the castle, with her grandson George V modernising it substantially.

The tour of the palace, first opened to the public in 1854, is unforgettable. The **Queen's Gallery** strolls through 89 portraits of Scottish kings, an unbroken lineage that dates back to the Egyptian pharaohs. **Mary Queen of Scots' Bed Chamber** in the 16th-century tower gives an insight into courtly romances – it connects via a secret staircase to her husband Lord Darnley's room. It was on this staircase that the Queen watched as Rizzio was stabbed 56 times for his possible affair with the Queen. To soothe such woes, the Queen may have retreated to **Queen Mary's Bath House**, a turreted lodge where she was believed to have bathed in white wine.

HOLYROOD PARK & ARTHUR'S SEAT

Edinburgh is blessed with having wilderness on its doorstep. Holyrood Park (Map pp750–1) covers 260 hectares of varied landscape, including mountains, moorland, lochs and fields, and contains some rare plants and insects. The highest point is the 251m-high extinct volcano, Arthur's Seat.

You can circumnavigate the park by car or bike and it has several excellent walks; the hike to the summit is the city's best and takes less than an hour, with a clear path all the way.

OUR DYNAMIC EARTH

Looking like a giant white crab, this interactive **museum** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 550 7800; www.dynamicearth.co.uk; Holyrood Rd; adult/child £8.95/5.45; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar; ♿) sits in the shadow of the brooding Salisbury Crags. While some say it's too much of a science theme park, it does make the environment and geology fun, with simulated journeys to the centre of the earth or exploring coral reefs. The earthquake machine will make scaredy cats shiver.

South of the Royal Mile

GRASSMARKET & AROUND

Dominated by the looming castle, this touristy enclave of restaurants and pubs can get frantic at weekends. This cheery spot was once the main place for public executions and more than 100 hanged Covenanters are commemorated with a cross at the eastern end. The 19th-century murderers William Burke and William Hare infamously enticed at least 18 victims into their boarding house here, suffocated them and sold the cadavers to Edinburgh's medical schools – a lesson to anyone looking for too-good-to-be-true accommodation in the capital.

STONE OF DESTINY

Believed to have accompanied the Scots in all their mythical journeys, the original Stone of Destiny (the Fatal Stone) was a carved block of sandstone brought to Scotland by missionaries from Ireland. In AD 838 it was eventually placed in the abbey at Scone, a couple of miles north of Perth, where for the next four and a half centuries Scottish monarchs were invested upon it.

Stolen by Edward I in 1296, this venerable talisman was incorporated into the Coronation Chair, used by English (and later British) monarchs, in Westminster Abbey. That is, until a plucky band of Scottish students re-abducted the Stone on Christmas Day 1950 and smuggled it back to Scotland, dropping and breaking it on the way (it was patched up by a stonemason).

King George VI was 'sorely troubled about the loss', but three months later the stone turned up on the altar of the ruined Arbroath Abbey. Before the public was aware that the stone had even been found, it was back in London. No charges were brought, and Ian Hamilton – who led this jolly caper and later became a prominent QC – published his story in *The Taking of the Stone of Destiny*.

In 1996 the sandstone block was returned to Scotland, but it now resides in Edinburgh Castle rather than at the site of the abbey in Scone.

Many Scots, however, hold that the original stone is safely hidden somewhere in Scotland and that Edward I was fobbed off with an imitation. This is possibly true – descriptions of the original stone state that it was decorated with intricate carvings. But given that Scottish nationalism is running high, this powerful symbol of Scotland would surely have been brought out by now.

The Grassmarket can be approached from George IV Bridge via **Victoria Street**, an unusual two-tiered street clinging to the ridge below the Royal Mile. The **Cowgate** runs parallel to the Royal Mile off the eastern end of the Grassmarket, under the George IV and South Bridges, and is a tunnel of nightlife and alleyways.

GREYFRIARS KIRK & KIRKYARD

At the bottom of a stone canyon of tenements, churches, volcanic cliffs and the castle, Greyfriars Kirkyard is one of Edinburgh's most evocative spots – a peaceful sanctuary of solemn memorials against a dramatic skyline.

The **church** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 5429; www.greyfriarskirk.com; Candlemaker Row; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri & 10.30am-2.30pm Sat Apr-Oct, 1.30-3.30pm Thu Nov-Mar) was built over a Franciscan friary and opened for worship in 1620. The National Covenant was signed here in 1638, affirming the independence of the Scottish Church from Charles I's attempts to reintroduce episcopacy. Many of those who signed were later executed and, in 1679, 1200 Covenanters were held prisoner in terrible conditions in an enclosure in the yard.

More heartwarmingly, the churchyard holds the remains of **Greyfriars Bobby** (Map pp754–5), a tenacious Skye terrier who, from 1858 to 1872, maintained a vigil over his master's grave being fed and cared for by locals. The story of loyalty, immortalised in a novel by Eleanor Atkinson, was later turned into a Disney film. Tour groups congregate on the street outside, around a humble statue of the faithful pup.

ROYAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND & MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND

These two **museums** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 247 4219; www.nms.ac.uk; Chambers St; admission free except special exhibits; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-8pm Tue, noon-5pm Sun; ♿) make a very good couple.

The Royal Museum of Scotland, with its bright, airy, sun-roofed hall, is a Victorian building housing a comprehensive collection covering the natural world; archaeology; Chinese, Islamic and European decorative art; and even technology. Next door, the beautifully integrated, modern, sandstone Museum of Scotland explores the history of Scotland in chronological order, starting with the country's earliest history in the basement and finishing with the most recent on the top floor. It has an emphasis on interactivity that always wows kids.

New Town

Over the deep valley of Princes Street Gardens, the 18th-century New Town runs along a parallel ridge to the Old Town, separated by the gully of the gardens. The elegant Georgian terraces and formal street grid contrast with the tangled confusion of streets of the Old Town.

It was born out of the 18th-century need to make over the crowded city that had changed little since the Middle Ages, and the architectural change coincided with the Scottish Enlightenment, drawing on the pragmatism in its design – hence the strict grid. The draining of disease-producing Nor Loch and the building of North Bridge revolutionised the city.

The New Town grew rapidly and continued to sprout squares, circuses, parks and terraces; some of its finest neoclassical architecture was designed by Robert Adam.

CALTON HILL

Rising above Edinburgh's stately skyline, **Calton Hill** is strewn with grandiose Athenian-style memorials mostly dating from the first half of the 19th century as Scottish Enlightenment figures such as David Hume were commemorated after their deaths. An out-of-place monument to Abraham Lincoln acknowledges the role of Scottish Americans in the American Civil War.

The summit affords tremendous views of Edinburgh, taking in a panorama from Holyrood Park to the Firth of Forth.

PRINCES STREET

Princes St is a retail thoroughfare with views across the gardens to the castle and the jumble of striking façades that line the Old Town.

About midway down Princes St, the massive Gothic spire of the **Scott Monument** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 529 4068; admission £3; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-3pm Mon-Sat & 10am-3pm Sun Oct-Mar), built by public subscription after Sir Walter Scott's death in 1832, testifies to his popularity. You enter this brooding edifice via Princes Street Gardens and climb 287 steps up a narrow winding staircase. From the top there are good views of the city.

Princes Street Gardens, home of a colourful Christmas market and ice rink in December, are cut by the **Mound** – a huge pile of earth dumped during the construction of the New Town, which provides a road link between the Old and New Towns.

Housed in a stunning church, the **National Portrait Gallery** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 624 6200; 1 Queen St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu) has a collection of portraiture (paintings and sculpture) that captures the good side of every Scot from Robert the Bruce to Robbie Coltrane.

ROYAL SCOTTISH ACADEMY & NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND

The Grecian-style **Royal Scottish Academy** (RSA; Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 6671; www.royalscottishacademy.org; The Mound; admission free except for special exhibitions; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; ♿), built in 1826, features a sleek underground exhibition space and shopping strip linked to its neighbour, the National Gallery. The Academy is devoted to exhibiting Scottish art (usually of a very high standard) by RSA members as well as regular visiting exhibitions.

The **National Gallery of Scotland** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 624 6200; www.nationalgalleries.org; The Mound; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu; ♿) is another imposing neoclassical building, housing a significant collection of European art. There are paintings by masters from the Renaissance to the Impressionists, including Titian's *Three Ages of Man* and Monet's *Haystacks*, but the works of Scottish artists – especially landscapes by William MacTaggart – warrant a long look.

GEORGE STREET & CHARLOTTE SQUARE

George St was originally envisaged as the main thoroughfare of the resi`dential New Town. It's now home to highly successful Scottish financial institutions. It runs from St Andrew Sq (home of Harvey Nichols and the bus station) in the east to Charlotte Sq in the west.

The latter square was designed in 1791 by Robert Adam and is regarded as the jewel of the New Town. On the northern side of the square is a Georgian masterpiece, Bute House at number 6, the official residence of Scotland's First Minister. Next door, the **Georgian House** (NTS; Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 2160; 7 Charlotte Sq; adult/child £5/4; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Nov, Dec & Mar) has been beautifully restored and refurnished to show how Edinburgh's elite lived at the end of the 18th century, when the New Town was first settled. A 35-minute video brings it all to life.

SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART

Just beyond Edinburgh's West End, the western extension of the New Town, this bright, modern **gallery** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 624 6200; www.nationalgalleries.org; 75 Belford Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Fri-Wed, 10am-7pm Thu) is housed in an impressive classical building surrounded by a sculpture park. The collection concentrates on 20th-century art, with works by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, René Magritte and Henry Moore among others. Most space is given to Scottish painters and it's small enough not to overwhelm. To get here, take bus 13 from George St.

Northern Edinburgh

The New Town's Georgian architecture extends north to **Stockbridge**, one of the most pleasant suburbs to wander through – it's quite trendy but has retained a village-like charm that gives it a distinct, vibrant identity. There are plenty of shops, restaurants and pubs here.

North of Stockbridge, the lovely **Royal Botanic Garden** (☎ 552 7171; www.rbge.org.uk; 20a Inverleith Row; admission free; 🕒 10am-dusk; ♿) is the second-oldest institution of its kind, with 70 landscaped hectares that are well worth a stroll for their exotic plants, colourful rhododendrons and views of Edinburgh's skyline. Buses 8, 17, 23, 27 and 37 pass the gardens.

LEITH

Colourful Leith is Edinburgh's main port, although it remained an independent burgh until the 1920s. It's still among Britain's busiest ports but in the 1960s and '70s it fell into a sad state – abandoned to council housing and frequented by drug dealers that inspired *Trainspotting*. A recent revival means that it's now home to many of the city's best pubs and restaurants.

Parts of this neighbourhood are still a little rough but it's a distinctive, colourful corner of Edinburgh. The prettiest area is around The Shore.

The **royal yacht Britannia** (☎ 555 5566; www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk; Ocean Dr, Leith; adult/child £9/5; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-3.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿), moored by the new Ocean Terminal shopping complex, was used for royal travels abroad from 1953 until its decommissioning in 1997. This monument to 1950s style and décor offers an intriguing insight into remarkably simple royal tastes. Exploration is via self-guided multilingual audio tour.

Buses 11, 22, 34 and 35 depart from St Andrew Sq to Leith regularly, with a bus for *Britannia* leaving regularly from Waverley Bridge outside the train station.

ACTIVITIES

Edinburgh has several spots to escape the city bustle on foot or two wheels. An obvious choice is Holyrood Park, where walkers ascend **Arthur's Seat** for spectacular views; a road runs right around the base of the volcano for an easy break right by the Royal Mile. From the southern side of the park, **Innocent Railway Cycle Path** runs eastwards to Musselburgh (5 miles).

You can walk or cycle along the wooded riverbanks of the **Water of Leith**, which runs from the Pentland Hills 20 miles down to the city centre, and on to Leith. There are access points and signposts throughout its length: one of the best short walks is from Stockbridge to historic Dean Village, where the waterway is spanned by a Thomas Telford bridge.

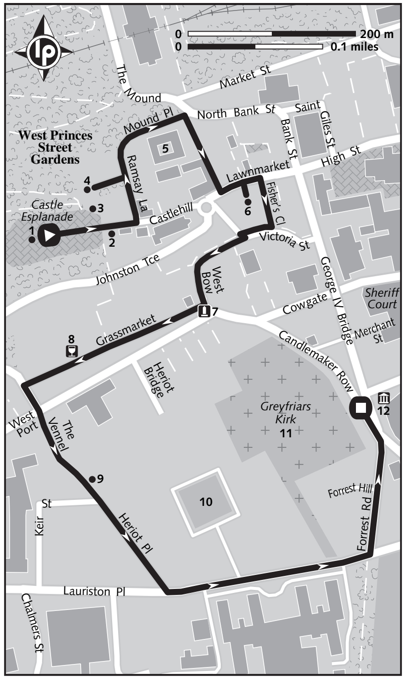
WALKING TOUR

The Old Town – the medieval part of town – stretches along the Royal Mile to the east of the castle and southwards to the Grassmarket and Greyfriars. This walk delves into the Old Town's many interesting nooks and crannies, and involves a fair bit of climbing steep stairs and closes.

Begin on the **Castle Esplanade (1)**, which affords grandstand views southwards over the Grassmarket; the prominent quadrangular building with all the turrets is George Heriot's School, which you'll pass later on. Head towards Castlehill and the start of the Royal Mile. The 17th-century house on the right, above the steps of North Castle Wynd, is known as **Cannonball House (2)** because of the iron ball lodged in the wall (look between, and slightly below, the two largest windows). It was not fired in anger, but instead marks the gravitation height to which water would flow naturally from the city's first piped water supply.

The low, rectangular building across the street (now a touristy tartan-weaving mill) was originally the reservoir that held the Old Town's water supply. On its western wall is the **Witches Well (3)**, where a modern bronze fountain commemorates around 4000 people (mostly women) who were burned or strangled in Edinburgh between 1479 and 1722 on suspicion of witchcraft.

Go past the reservoir and turn left down Ramsay Lane, and take a look at **Ramsay Garden (4)** – one of the most desirable addresses in Edinburgh – where late-19th-century apartments were built around the nucleus of the octagonal Ramsay Lodge, once home to poet



WALK FACTS

Start Castle Esplanade
Finish Museum of Scotland
Distance 1.5 miles
Duration one to two hours

Allan Ramsay. The cobbled street continues around to the right below student residences, to the twin towers of the **New College (5)** – home to Edinburgh University's Faculty of Divinity. Nip into the courtyard to see the statue of John Knox (p753).

Just past New College, turn right and climb up the stairs into Milne's Court, a student residence that houses the public entrance to what was once the temporary home of the Scottish Parliament. Exit into the Lawnmarket, cross the street (bearing slightly left) and duck into **Riddell's Court (6)** at number 322–8, a typical Old Town close. You'll find yourself in a small courtyard, but the house in front of you, built in 1590, was originally the edge of the street (the building you just walked under was added in 1726 – check the inscription in the doorway on the right). The arch (with the inscription 'VIVENDO DISCIMUS', 'we live and learn') leads into the original 16th-century courtyard.

Go back into the street, turn right, and then right again down Fisher's Close, which ejects you onto the delightful Victoria Tce, strung above the cobbled curve of shop-lined Victoria St. Wander right, enjoying the view, then descend the stairs at the foot of Upper Bow and continue downhill to the Grassmarket (p756). At the eastern end, outside Maggie Dickson's pub, is the **Covenanters' Monument (7)**; if you're feeling peckish, there are several good places to eat and a couple of good pubs – legendary poet Robert Burns once stayed at the **White Hart Inn (8)**.

At the west end of the Grassmarket, turn left up the flight of stairs known as the Vennel. At the top of the steps on the left you'll find the **Flodden Wall (9)**. Follow its extension, the Telfer Wall, to Lauriston Pl and turn left along the impressive façade of **George Heriot's School (10)**, which was founded in 1628. This is the back of the building – the front was designed to face the castle and impress the inhabitants of the Grassmarket.

Finish off your walk with a stroll through **Greyfriars Kirkyard** (**11**; p757) to inspect the grave of Robert Adam, the architect responsible for some of the New Town's more impressive buildings. If you still need to stretch your legs, wander the halls of the **Museum of Scotland** (**12**; p757) or enjoy dinner at Tower restaurant (p765).

EDINBURGH FOR CHILDREN

Littlies love Edinburgh for its spooky medieval look and Harry Potter associations (see the boxed text, p753) and there's plenty of attractions that cater for them.

The *List* (www.list.co.uk) has a special kids section listing activities and events in and around Edinburgh. A good time to visit is during the **Children's International Theatre Festival** (☎ 225 8050; www.imaginate.org.uk) in late May.

On sunny days (yeah, right) you can hit the Edinburgh Zoo (p771) or wander through the Royal Botanic Garden (p759). Visiting Greyfriars Bobby's statue (p757) is a great chance to tell the story of the 1961 Disney movie of the same name (which you can rent before you go).

When it's raining you can visit the Museum of Scotland (p757), which has hands-on fun at the Discovery Centre; or let thrill-seekers try the earthquake simulator at Our Dynamic Earth (p756), or tour the haunted Real Mary King's Close (p753). For a few more educational fast rides the Connect section at the Royal Museum of Scotland (p757) is a new interactive area with robots that explore alien planets plus the chance to be a Formula 1 driver.

Older children will appreciate the bird's-eye view of the Camera Obscura (p752) and the cartoons at the National Portrait Gallery (p758). And if you want to burn some excess energy out of teenagers, Adrian's City Cycle Tour (below) gets the thumbs up from readers.

TOURS

You can check out a variety of bus tours, most of which take in the various sites, at the Edinburgh Tours website (www.edinburghtour.com). These recommended bus tours all depart from Waverley Bridge:

City Sightseeing Edinburgh (☎ 220 0770; www.city-sightseeing.com; 1hr tours adult/child £9/3; 🕑 9am-4pm) Famous open-topped buses that are hop-on, hop-off to most sights.
Mac Tours (☎ 220 0770; www.mactours.co.uk; adult/child £9/3; 🕑 9.45am-4pm) Similar tours in vintage buses.
Majestic Tour (☎ 220 0770; adult/child £9/3) Runs to the royal yacht *Britannia* at Ocean Terminal via the Royal Botanic Garden and Newhaven, returning via Leith Walk, Holyrood and the Royal Mile. Call ahead for hours.

If you're up for a stroll, Edinburgh's cobbled streets offer plenty of good walking tours:

Edinburgh Literary Pub Tour (☎ 0800 169 7410; www.edinburghliterarypubtour.co.uk; adult £8; 🕑 tours 7.30pm) Making the tenuous connection between great writing and hard liquor, this great tour is hosted by intellectual McBrain and yobbish wit Clart. Discounts for web purchase. Tour length depends on drinking time; allow at least two hours.
Mercat Tours (☎ 557 6464; www.mercattours.com; 1½hr tours adult/child £7/£3.50; 🕑 tours 7pm & 8pm) Takes spooky trips into Edinburgh's excavated underground closes and vaults, which have been the site of many reported supernatural phenomena.
Trainspotting Tours (☎ 0131-555 2500; www.leithwalks.co.uk; adult £8) Not just for Irvine Welsh fans as it wanders Leith with humour and history; check website for tour days.

If you're still feeling active, the highly recommended three-hour **Adrian's City Cycle Tour** (☎ 07966 447206; www.edinburghcycletour.com; tours adult/child £15/5; 🕑 tours 10am & 2.30pm) takes you on a 5-mile ride around the city; meet by the gates of Holyroodhouse, but phone ahead to ensure bikes are available.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

No other city in Britain could claim to be *the* festival city like Edinburgh, with its events for books, music and… errr, fringes. Most events cluster around August, when accommodation books up, streets fill with costumed hawkers proffering show pamphlets, and parking in the city would just be silly. You can find listings for all of Edinburgh's festivals on the umbrella website www.edinburgh-festivals.com.

The three-week **Edinburgh International Festival** is the world's largest arts festival, with music, theatre, dance and a hundred other arts genres. Pre-booking is a must, with the programme published in March. The festival office **Hub** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 473 2000; www.eif.co.uk; Highland Tolbooth Kirk, Castlehill; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) offers programmes, discount vouchers and tickets. If you haven't planned ahead, half-price tickets to some performances may be sold on the day at the Hub.

Running almost simultaneously is the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe**, an experimental extravaganza of would-be stars and avant-garde performances. The repertoire is eclectic and while stand-up comedy dominates, you can see shows from chainsaw juggling to kitten snuggling. Booking is essential and tickets cost from £5 to £10; during the first two days the box office holds a two-for-one ticket frenzy and the *Scotsman* newspaper offers two-for-one vouchers every day in its Festival Guide. There's also a hundred completely free shows, a month of street theatre on the Royal Mile and Fringe Sunday. Programmes and tickets are available, from June, from the **Festival Fringe Society** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 0000; www.edfringe.com; 180 High St).

Also in August, the hugely popular **Edinburgh Military Tattoo** is a lavish event of regimental displays from around the Commonwealth on the Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle. Contact the **Edinburgh Tattoo Office** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 1188; www.edinburgh-tattoo.co.uk; 33 Market St) for tickets. The 10-day **Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival** (☎ 668 2019; www.jazzmusic.co.uk) attracts the world's top musicians from trad to skat to acid. Film buffs invade for the two-week **Edinburgh International Film Festival** (Filmhouse; Map pp754-5; ☎ 623 8030; www.edfilmfest.org.uk; 88 Lothian Rd), the world's oldest film festival. Bibliophiles crowd Charlotte Sq for the **Edinburgh Book Festival** (☎ 228 5444; www.edbookfest.co.uk; 137 Dundee St), which also runs for two weeks.

There are also festivals outside of August:

Children's International Theatre Festival (☎ 225 8050; www.imaginate.org.uk) Last week of May. Performing arts gala for children.

Edinburgh's Christmas (☎ 529 3914; www.edinburghschristmas.com) December. Yuletide shindig that includes a street parade, fairground and open-air ice rink in Princes Street Gardens.

Hogmanay (www.edinburghshogmanay.org) 31 December. Scottish traditional New Year's celebration that includes a massive street party on Princes St.

SLEEPING

There's plenty of accommodation in Edinburgh, but during festival times the city still fills up, so pre-booking is a must. Prices listed here do not reflect Edinburgh Festival rates, when prices increase dramatically. Beware of dodgy hostels that change names frequently to avoid their reputations (and possibly the police) from catching up with them.

Old Town & South of the Royal Mile

BUDGET

Budget Backpackers (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 6531; www.budgetbackpackers.com; 39 Cowgate, The Grassmarket; dm £10.50-15, tw £36) This fun spot piles on the extras, with bike storage, pool tables, laundry, breakfast (£2 extra) and new chrome kitchens. You'll pay a little more for four-bunk dorms, but larger dorms are roomy enough and there's long-term accommodation across the road. Only downside is that the prices increase (£1.50) on weekends, but otherwise a brilliant spot to doss.

Edinburgh Central SYHA (☎ 0870 155 3255; 9 Haddington Pl; dm £15) This brand-spanking new hostel (it had only just opened when we visited) is the SYHA's appeal to a new generation of flashpackers, with a bistro as well as self-catering kitchen. Everything's gleaming and new, with comfy beds and en suite dorms. There's more than 300 beds, so you may get lost in this multi-storey complex, but it's a good bet for vacancies, with a handy location off Leith Walk.

Stretched over two buildings (Brodies and Brodies 2), **Brodies** (Map pp754-5; www.brodieshostels.co.uk; dm £12, d from £45; 💻) has two convenient addresses on the Royal Mile. The original **Brodies** (☎ 556 2223; 93 High St) is smaller (50 beds), with four dorms (one a dedicated women's dorm) and a cosy lounge with a fireplace. **Brodies 2** (☎ 556 6770; 12 High St), higher up the hill, has good family and double rooms as well. Both shy away from bigger groups, so they're good places to meet other travellers.

Other recommendations:

Castle Rock Hostel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 9666; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 15 Johnston Tce; dm £12-14, d £40-45; 💻) Scenically positioned near the castle, this is a popular spot and part of the MacBackers group. Receives good feedback from travellers.

High Street Hostel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 3984; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; 8 Blackfriars St; dm £12-13.50; 💻 wi-fi) Another excellent option just off the Royal Mile, with a party reputation and plenty of facilities.

MIDRANGE

Newington Rd and Bruntsfield are both good hunting grounds for B&Bs.

Amaryllis Guesthouse (Map pp750-1; ☎ 229 3293; 21 Upper Gilmore Pl; s/d/tr £30/50/75) This elegantly restored Georgian town house has huge rooms, with own bath in many rooms. It also offers triples, which are hard to find in Edinburgh, and is ideal for families who want to explore the Old Town but would like to stay in a quieter pocket.

Afton Guest House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 229 1019; www.aftonguesthouse.co.uk; 1 Hartington Gardens; s/d £36/60) The 'tartantastica' downstairs belies the tastefully decorated rooms upstairs, which have nice touches such as your own bathrobe and mini-lounges. Though not as cheap as it once was, it remains a clean spot with spacious rooms.

Cluaran House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 221 0047; www.cluaran-house-edinburgh.co.uk; 47 Leamington Tce; s/d & tw from £40/80) Bright and arty, this restored town house is a stylish guesthouse known for its welcoming owners. Period features and wooden floorboards are kept, but the bold decoration makes this place an explosion of colour. Breakfasts are also good, particularly the veggie option.

Greenhouse (Map pp750-1; ☎ 622 7634; www.greenhouse-edinburgh.com; 14 Hartington Gardens; s/d £65/70) In a neighbourhood nook, this guesthouse has an emphasis on the ecological that includes no animal products in the bathroom. The breakfast room is similarly protected as a vegan/vegetarian oasis in flesh-focused Scotland. Plus it can offer advice on walks around the area, and meat-free dining options.

Dukes of Windsor Street (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 6046; www.dukesofwindsor.com; 17 Windsor St; d £76-100) Shrugging off the guesthouse tat of others in this area, this stylish spot offers premier rooms with sexy dark-wood furniture amid minimalist whites. Breakfasts run to croissants, salmon, a selection of teas and fresh fruits. Don't mistake the price tag for a guesthouse, because this is really a boutique hotel.

Other recommendations:

Kingsview Guest House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 229 8004; www.kingsviewguesthouse.com; 28 Gilmore Pl; r per person from £20) A good option that feels a bit like a Highland seaside retreat, with family rooms and paperback library.

Hopetoun (Map pp750-1; ☎ 667 7691; www.hopetoun.com; 15 Mayfield Rd; s/d £25/50) Has two large, homely rooms decorated with bold modern paintings; owner happily offers tourist tips.

Southside Guest House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 668 4422; www.southsideguesthouse.co.uk; 8 Newington Rd; s/d from £50/64) A sophisticated option that mostly caters for couples, with embellishments such as DVD players and good coffee at breakfast.

TOP END

Scotsman Hotel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 5565; www.thescotsmanhotel.com; North Bridge; s/d £240/500, ste £450; P 💻 🏊) Once 'the most magnificent newspaper building in the world', this building has had every trace of ink refurbished from it to become Edinburgh's grandest hotel. It's decked out in its own tweed with more than 50 wood-panelled rooms enjoying either New Town views or more spectacular views over North Bridge; all come with DVDs and computers. The penthouse is supreme decadence, with its own sauna, library and rooftop barbecue.

Witchery by the Castle (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 5613; www.thewitchery.com; 352 Castlehill; ste from £295) Flamboyantly Gothic, this hotel plays up its location close to the castle by reworking a 16th-century Old Town house into seven suites of pure decadence. Each suite is individually designed but all are kitted out with four-poster beds, antique furniture and even the odd suit of armour. With the fabulous Witchery restaurant added into the deal, it's hard to resist this beguiling hotel.

New Town & Northern Edinburgh

BUDGET

Edinburgh Caravan Club Site (☎ 312 6874; www.caravanclub.co.uk; 35 Marine Dr; tent sites £3.50-5, plus per person £3.80-5) Five miles from the city, this caravan park is nicely positioned overlooking the Firth of Forth, and has excellent facilities. It's geared primarily to caravans, but there are still plenty of tent sites. It's essential to book during summer, when no cars are allowed in the tent area. Take bus 8A from Broughton St.

Belford Hostel (Map pp750-1; ☎ 225 6209; www.hoppo.com; 6-8 Douglas Gardens; dm £12.50-18, tw & d £42.50; 💻) This converted church keeps many of its original fittings (including gorgeous stained-glass windows) and adds a cheery bar and decent kitchen to make for a religious experience. Rooms have between four and 10 beds each, with prices inverse to the bunkage, plus a good rate for weekly stays (£50). Check out the colourful cartoons in the common room, which are anything but holy.

MIDRANGE

Eyre Pl and Pilrig St both have several guesthouse options.

Dene Guest House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 2700; www.deneguesthouse.com; 7 Eyre Pl; s £25-36, d £30-40) A favourite with solo travellers for its affordable single rooms, this Georgian house is accommodating if a little cramped. Idiosyncratic rooms can come with en suites at the upper end of the price range and have wooden fittings right down to the loos. The friendly French hostess is an asset to this charming property.

Caravel Guest House (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 4444; www.caravelhouse.co.uk; 30 London St; r per person £30) Handy for Broughton St's pubs and restaurants, this option is chintzily decorated but rooms have springy mattresses and brilliant bathtubs. Hospitality here is cracking, with plenty of advice on Broughton St's best beers and hearty breakfasts to soak up the hangover in the morning.

Frederick House Hotel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 1999; www.townhousehotels.co.uk; 42 Frederick St; d £60-90) This well-positioned hotel is decked out in lovely interior wallpaper with roomy double beds and large baths to soak away the day's walking aches. It's also one of few options in this range that has a lift, which is ideal is you've got lots of baggage.

Christopher North House Hotel (Map pp750-1; ☎ 225 2720; www.christophernorth.co.uk; 6 Gloucester Pl; d £98) This classy boutique hotel is one of Stockbridge's best options. Once the home of a writer and philosopher, it's been re-fitted so rooms feature writing desks, baths and some impressive views (though these may cost you a little more). The Mozart Kaffee Haus makes a good spot for a warming hot chocolate (or perhaps something a little stronger) on your way out and breakfasts are made all the more brilliant by the room's chandeliers.

Other recommendations:

Original Raj (Map pp750-1; ☎ 346 1333; www.rajempire.com; 6 West Coates; s/d £40/50; P) An Indian-inspired guesthouse right down to the samosas for breakfast and the elephant in the front yard.

Balmoral Guest House (☎ 554 1857; www.balmoralguesthouse.co.uk; 32 Pilrig St; d £45) A homey spot with the owner's passion for old radios displayed throughout;

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND: LEITH

Once a rough part of Edinburgh that was best used as inspiration for *Trainspotting* and not much else, Leith is becoming a byword for urban renewal. There's plenty of exploring to be done wandering along its waters and popping for the occasional pint at a pub.

If you're after a dining experience, **Fishers** (☎ 554 5666; 1 The Shore, Leith; mains £13-16; 🕒 noon-10.30pm) makes a cosy bistro in a 17th-century signal tower on the Leith shore. Seafood is definitely recommended anywhere in Leith, but here it's a real treat. The **Vintner's Room** (☎ 554 6767; www.thevintnersrooms.com; The Vaults, 87 Giles St, Leith; mains £18-23; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) is another place for excellent meals here.

No hotel represents the reinvention of Leith like the arrival of the chic boutique chain **Malmaison** (☎ 468 5000; www.malmaison.com; 1 Tower Pl, Leith; r from £129; p), which is located in a former seamen's mission. There's no trace of fish scales today as this ultra-hip hotel overlooks the waters of Leith in the nicest part of the port. Rooms are perfect for a romantic weekend, with beds built for sin or sopor, CD players, great bathrooms and plenty of contemporary flair.

communal breakfast table is ideal for meeting other travellers.

Terrace Hotel (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 3423; www.terracehotel.co.uk; 37 Royal Tce; s/d from £31/60) Suits independent travellers, with a large front room and older shared bathrooms.

TOP END

Glasshouse (Map pp754-5; ☎ 525 8200; www.theetoncollection.com; 2 Greenside Pl; r from £200; 🅿) It may seem odd to locate this slick hotel in a former church near the Omni centre, but the modern design inside whisks you off to another world. Floor-to-ceiling windows in rooms afford spectacular views, especially if you're enjoying room service on the leather couches or, ideally between the Egyptian cotton sheets. The rooftop garden is another highlight.

Balmoral Hotel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 2414; www.thebalmoralhotel.com; 1 Princes St; s/d from £210/240; 🅿 🏊) This auspicious icon near Waverley station has long been regarded as Edinburgh's best bed. Views over Princes St and the Scott Monument from luxurious rooms that include marble bathrooms and 18th-century design offer a unique experience. Big-name festival guests usually stay here.

EATING

There are good-value restaurants scattered all around the city. For cheap eats, the best areas are where the student population is high – especially near the university around Nicolson St – but you can also take advantage of the fact that most Edinburgh restaurants offer a very cheap set menu at lunchtime. Two of the best zones for evening dining are Stockbridge and around The Shore in Leith.

Old Town & South of the Royal Mile

BUDGET

our pick **Elephants & Bagels** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 668 4404; www.elephanthouse.co.uk; 37 Marshall St; bagels £2-4; 🕒 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) All the tourists may be at Elephant House for the Potter shots, but some of the best bites can be found here. Popular with students (we're talking massive lunch lines), it does snappy bagels such as raisins and pinenuts or chicken tikka, plus there are breakfast bagels with the likes of scrambled eggs and salmon. You can save yourself the 15p eat-in fee in favour of sharing the sunny square with the students.

Elephant House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 5355; 21 George IV Bridge; snacks £3-5; 🕒 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat & Sun; 💻) Brilliant café that does baguettes, pastries and coffees powerful enough to inspire JK Rowling to pen Harry Potter (see the boxed text, p753).

Engine Shed (Map pp750-1; ☎ 662 0040; www.engineshed.org.uk; 19 St Leonard's Lane; lunches £3-6) This is an ideal spot for a cuppa and a bakery-fresh scone after climbing down Arthur's Seat. It's been set up to help special-needs adults and as well as having their own bakery they also make their own tofu, which is used plentifully through curries. Once the terminus of the rail network, this place is a favoured haunt of local writer Ian Rankin.

Forest (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 4538; www.theforest.org.uk; 2 Bristo Pl; light meals £3-5; 💻 wi-fi) This grungy spot is for bohemians, digital hippies and artists as it hosts gigs from poetry to punk with an art space called Totalkunst (mind your language… oh, the German word for art). But its vegetarian food is worth sitting through the odd bad poetry event in the evenings, with brimming salads, soups and flavoursome curries. The dreadlocked zippies bring in their laptops and make a soy chai last as long as it takes to use the wi-fi.

MIDRANGE

Outsider (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 3131; 15 George IV Bridge; dishes £6-10; 🕒 noon-11pm; ♿) This Edinburgh stalwart is known for its rainforest interior (ferns in an atmospheric darkness) and has a brilliant menu that jumps straight in with mains such as rabbit cassoulet. The Sunday brunch features DJs and hangover-busting breakfasts.

David Bann Vegetarian Restaurant & Bar (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 5888; www.davidbann.com; 56-58 St Mary's St; mains £9-11; 🕒 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, 11am-10.30pm Fri & Sat) On a one-man mission to convince the world that vegetarian food doesn't have to mean alfalfa and mashed yeast, Bann has been thrilling locals with his sophisticated vegetarian cuisine for years. The Thai fritters are packed with flavours such as ginger, lime, green chilli and sesame, while the risotto verdi blends asparagus and rocket with a twirl of mascarpone. The creative menu has enough zest to convert a carnivore.

Apartment (Map pp750-1; ☎ 228 6456; 7-13 Barclay Pl; mains £9-14; 🕒 dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) Whether it's in the décor or the menu, simple yet modish is the order of the day at this eatery. Dishes are divided into 'things': succulent fish things such as the baked sea bass papillote with king prawns and pepped up with chilli and lime are our favourite, but the introduction of inventive kebab-like lines such as roasted vegetable and goats cheese are both healthy and popular.

Fenwick's Restaurant (Map pp750-1; ☎ 667 4265; www.fenwicks-restaurant.co.uk; 15 Salisbury Pl; mains £20; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Frequented by Edinburgh's fictional detective Inspector Rebus, this discreet spot does solid interpretations of traditional Scottish food, including a very good haddock-and-pea risotto and a mouthwatering roasted sea bream. The nonfictional crowd are mature professorial types from the nearby university, so dust off your tweeds and spectacles to fit in.

Other recommendations:

Phenecia (Map pp754-5; ☎ 662 4493; 55 West Nicolson St; set lunches £4.95, mains £6-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Truly global menu with good vegetarian options. Celebrates its 20th year in 2007.

Maison Bleue (Map pp754-5; ☎ 226 1900; www.maison-bleue.co.uk; 36-38 Victoria St; meals £8-13; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Where France meets North Africa, you'll find the menu for this likable eatery.

TOP END

Witchery by the Castle (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 5613; 352 Castlehill; set lunches £9.95, mains £20-30; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Inspiring dining in a romantic environment just down from the castle, with an affordable lunch option.

Tower (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 3003; www.tower-restaurant.com; mains £16-30; 🕒 lunch & dinner) With a rooftop spot in the Museum of Scotland, this

FANCY A BIT OF SCOTTISH?

Scotland's cuisine has long been dismissed as one born out of deprivation (why else would you eat sheep's stomach or dry oatcakes?), but modern Scottish cuisine isn't afraid to get playful with its traditions and use the best seafood and game to come up with some fantastic dishes. It's not about haggis, it's not the cullen skink – it's a red-meated main served with a side of innovation.

Some of our favourite proponents of Scottish cuisine:

Howie's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 5766; 29 Waterloo Pl; 2-course lunches/dinners £8.75/15.95; 🕒 lunch & dinner)
Monster Mash (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 5782; 47 Thistle St; mains £5-7; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)
Stac Polly (www.stacpolly.co.uk; mains £14-20; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Grindlay St (Map pp754-5; ☎ 229 5405; 8-10 Grindlay St) Dublin St (☎ 556 2231; 29-33 Dublin St)
Tower (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 3003; www.tower-restaurant.com; mains £16-30 🕒 lunch & dinner)

Still hungry? There's some great meals to be had elsewhere, so pack your knife and fork for these foodie road trips:

- Gary Moore's Restaurant at the Station (p804)
- Linen Room (p809)
- Quail 2 (p896)
- Ubiquitous Chip (p794)

is a top-of-the-town dining room. The slender, slinky dining room and sometimes-too-nippy outdoor area afford excellent Old Town views, while serving up new Scottish cuisine including roasted venison with Stornoway black pudding or lobster with asparagus and curry oil. And if you don't believe it's fabulous: Joanna Lumley has been known to dine here when in town.

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L'Alba D'Oro (Map pp750-1; ☎ 557 2580; www.lalbadoro.com; 5-7 Henderson Row; fish supper £4-6; 🕑 5pm-11pm) Pronouncing any place as Edinburgh's best chippie is always contentious, but with a busy knot of cars shuffling for parks outside, this place gets the nod from many locals. But it's more than a chippie; you wouldn't expect a 300+ wine list at your average deep-fryer, nor could you get zesty prawn suppers or veggie haggis.

Monster Mash (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 5782; 47 Thistle St; mains £5-7; 🕑 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) This is *the* place to get great British nostalgia grub. The menu is deceptively simple: soup or sausages and mash. But these snags are sublime, with vegetarian options and daily specials such as pepper, apple and leek. This place is so successful it's started competing with itself, opening a Monster Mex outlet opposite that does pricier Tex-Mex meals. Either way it's a gravy-yard smash.

Urban Angel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 6215; www.urban-angel.co.uk; 121 Hanover St; meals £7-12, snacks £4-6; 🕑 noon-11pm Mon-Sat, 5-11pm Sun; 💻) This heaven-sent spot has a quick-fix snack bar (think gourmet wraps, juices and java) out front and a more relaxed dining area with a chilled white interior. The eat-in menu is divine, with a risotto that's pepped up with Glen Almond pork with Arran smoked cheeses.

Other recommendations:

Henderson's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 2131; www.hendersonsofedinburgh.co.uk; 94 Hanover St; snacks £2-4; 🕑 8am-10.45pm Mon-Sat) Healthy picnic food is sold in the shop, with great Salad Table restaurant out the back specialising in good-for-you grub.

Blue Moon Café (Map pp750-1; ☎ 557 0911; 36 Broughton St; light meals £4-8; 🕑 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri-Sun) A local favourite that does sensational burgers and weekend all-day breakfasts.

MIDRANGE

Thai Me Up In Edinburgh (Map pp750-1; ☎ 558 9234; www.timeup.com; 4 Picardy St; set lunch £6, meals £8-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Despite the puntastic title this is actually a stylish spot with plenty of veggie options. There's tempura drenched in rich plum sauce or spring rolls presented as bon bons packed with mint and noodles that you're bound to enjoy. A portrait of the King of Thailand presides over the room and from his cheeky grin, he seems to approve.

Howie's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 5766; 29 Waterloo Pl; 2-course lunches/dinners £8.75/15.95; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The best of four branches of this popular institution is in a former chapel that is best appreciated at a table on the raised altar. The ever-evolving menu reinterprets the best of Scottish produce, and is excellent value for the quality.

Dionika (☎ 652 3993; ww.dionika.com; 3-6 Canonmills Bridge; mains £14-17; 🕑 lunch & dinner daily) This hip Spanish deli–style place complete with hanging meats and garlic excels at tapas and seafood (due to the owners' year of trading in fish). Want to sample the best? You should go for the grand parillada, a for-two serve of everything that's great about Scottish seafood. The only downside is the rather hard wrought-iron chairs – they may be authentic but they're uncomfortable after a while.

Stac Polly (☎ 556 2231; www.stacpolly.co.uk; 29-33 Dublin St; mains £14-20; 🕑 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Frowned on by some traditionalists, this tartan tearaway does Scottish with a twist. Expect haggis to be parcelled up in filo and drizzled with plum sauce, and puddings worth saving some room for. The Old Town branch (Map pp754–5; ☎ 229 5405, 8-10 Grindlay St) has slightly more tartan, but the stonework of this branch gives it the better ambience.

Other recommendations:

Loon Fung (☎ 556 1781; 2 Warriston Pl; mains £7-12; 🕑 noon-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-11.30pm Sat & Sun; ♿) Edinburgh's old water chestnut that does genuine Cantonese.

Phuket Pavilion (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 4323; www.phuketpavilion.co.uk; 121 Hanover St; mains £12-14; 🕑 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) A heaven-sent Thai with a quick-fix takeaway out front and relaxed dining area inside.

TOP END

Vintners Rooms (☎ 554 6767; www.thevintnersrooms.com; The Vaults, 87 Giles St, Leith; mains £18-23; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This discreet dark restaurant has long been known as one of Edinburgh's best. The auspicious stone building was originally commissioned by the Vintners Guild in 1739 but now serves up stuffed quail and osso bucco. The set lunch (two courses for £15.50) allows you to experience top-notch cuisine without frightening your bank manager.

DRINKING

From wood-panelled locals to grungy student speakeasies, there's a place for every kind of drinker in Edinburgh. Happy hunting grounds for pubs and bars include Broughton St, the university area, Stockbridge and Leith. Coffee places abound in the city, including converted police boxes, cheesily called Coppachino and other punny names, handing out quick caffeine fixes.

Old Town & South of the Royal Mile

Borough (Map pp750-1; ☎ 668 2255; www.boroughhotel.com; 72-80 The Causeway) Slinky leather couches and intimate lighting make everyone look attractive at this hotel bar, which stocks European beers and inventive cocktails. On Saturday night there's a tinkling piano, while Friday features local DJs.

Cloisters (Map pp754-5; ☎ 221 9997; 26 Brougham St; 🕑 noon-midnight) Everyone's favourite place to stop in on the way into the city, this endearing spot in a former church manse is right next door to the church and is a sanctuary for drinkers. Worshippers of real ale give praise to the old-style pews in this intimate spot.

Pear Tree House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 667 7533; 38 West Nicolson St) It's hard not to love this boisterous pub, which has its roots firmly in Edinburgh's student zone, with a beer garden that's ideal for summer. The absorbing board games and too-comfy seats have many late essays and unprepared-for exams on their conscience.

Beanscene (Map pp754-5; ☎ 667 5697; www.beanscene.com; 99 Nicolson St; 🕑 7.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-11pm Sun) Late-night caffiends know this is the spot for their java jolt as they join the procrastinating student crowd. Sure it's a chain, but it's definitely the strongest link, with loungey couches and powerful coffee. Whether it's for the odd local bands or a java rendezvous, this bright spot is all about being seen.

Other recommendations:

Bennet's Bar (Map pp750-1; ☎ 229 5143; 8 Leven St) Small, historic pub with Victorian fittings and mature crowd.

Centraal (Map pp754-5; ☎ 667 7355; 32 West Nicholson St; 🕑 11am-1pm Mon-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) A downstairs studenty lounge with smooth music and comfy lounges.

Human Be-in (Map pp754-5; ☎ 662 8860; www.humanbe-in.co.uk; 2-8 West Crosscauseway) Popular with a well-to-do university crowd, this place has an excellent wine list.

Traverse Bar Café (Map pp754-5; ☎ 228 5383; 10 Cambridge St) Under Traverse Theatre, this pre-play tippler has art exhibitions on the walls.

New Town & Northern Edinburgh

Café Royal Circle Bar (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 1884; 19 West Register St) Famous as a location for *Chariots of Fire*, this elaborately decorated bar is one of the best in town. Tile panels feature famous Scots and the bar has traditional polished brass, but the ceiling is a masterpiece. Amid all this grandeur the crowd is a genuine group enjoying a post-work bevvy.

Kay's Bar (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 1858; 39 Jamaica St West) Tired of them pubs where the TV's

IRN WHO?

You may notice in the wee hours of the morning that many Scots will look to an orange fizzy drink to take care of the excesses of the night before. The miracle juice is Irn Bru, long promoted as Scotland's other national drink, and it has traditionally outsold Coca-Cola in Scotland, though recent sales figures put the two beverages neck and neck.

The soft drink maker Barr began making Irn Bru in 1901, calling it 'Iron-Brew' (labelling regulations forced the change in spelling to 'Irn-Bru' in 1946). The claim that it was made with 'real iron girders' is probably based on the ingredient ammonium ferric citrate, which along with caffeine, sugar and water makes up the flavour. The true recipe of Irn Bru is only ever known to two members of Barrs' board, who guard it with their lives.

Irn Bru is known for its cheeky advertising campaigns. Recently the new energy drink, Irn Bru 32, featured a loud Glaswegian cuckoo busting through the walls of a library to wake a dozy student by yelling 'Wakey wakey!' then telling off a librarian. Complaints that the humorous ad encouraged violence and a negative image of Glasgow were answered by re-dubbing, so the hard bird now replies with an English accent to a shushing librarian 'I say, awfully sorry, didn't mean to cause offence'.

Beyond the hype, there's the taste: vaguely citrusy and teeming with sugar. Does it cure the almighty hangover? Well the caffeine will certainly help, but the best thing for a hangover is drinking heavily the night before.

blaring in the background? This former wine merchant (walls are decorated with old wine barrels) is the cosy little pub for you. The rustic ambience is designed not to get in the way of sampling real ales and malt whiskies.

Street (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 4272; www.thestreetbar.com; 2 Picardy Pl) Part-owned by local DJ Trendy Wendy, this place attracts pre-clubbers with a sexy chrome-and-leather interior. A trippy fish-sphere keeps an eye on the cocktail-mixing and snogging booths as the crowd warms up for nights at Ego (see opposite). A funky local with a good range of bottled beers.

Star Bar (Map pp750-1; ☎ 539 8070; www.starbar.co.uk; 1 Northumberland Pl) Hard to find but worth the pilgrimage for one of the New Town's best jukeboxes and pleasant beer garden out the back. Oddly, Thursday night attracts a backgammon championship and there's an ingeniously decorated football table. Don't ask about the skull, which many believe has claimed the lives of those who touch it.

Barony Bar (Map pp750-1; ☎ 557 0546; 81 Broughton St) Pulling off the trick of being traditional and simultaneously hip, this boozer works miracles with real ales and on-tap lagers. Worn tables, a jovial crowd and warming fires mean that this spot remains a firm favourite, especially for reading the Sunday papers.

Outhouse (Map pp750-1; ☎ 557 6668; 12a Brougham St Lane) This more mature spot has a relaxed crowd that enjoys the occasional guitarist playing and DJs on weekends. The beer garden out the back is known for canoodling, especially during winter when heaters keep it sultry.

WORTH THE TRIP

With so many pubs in 'Auld Reekie', why would you head out to the uninspiringly named Duddingston? The answer is the **Sheep Heid Inn** (☎ 656 6951; 43 The Causeway, Duddingston; meals £8-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner), possibly Edinburgh's oldest boozer, with a licence dating back to 1360. Mary Queen of Scots had a tipple here and Bonnie Prince Charlie sampled the ales in the main bar that's gorgeously lit by leaded glass. As well as some tasty ales there's also some good grub on offer, from barbecued venison burgers to lamb shanks. The beer garden affords views of Arthur's Seat and if you're walking up the hill this is the perfect spot to reward yourself with a pint.

Cumberland Bar (Map pp750-1; ☎ 558 3134; 1 Cumberland St) One of the New Town's cosiest, this bar pours real ales and is known for its burgers. The dreamy beer garden is a treat in summer, but the homey wooden interior when it's filled with raconteur locals is tough to beat.

Other recommendations:

Antiquary (Map pp750-1; ☎ 225 2858; 72 St Stephen St) Another character-laden Stockbridge boozer, this basement bar has chrome salespeople shaking their heads in dismay.

Port o'Leith (☎ 554 3568; 58 Constitution St, Leith) Leith gem that harks back to the area's nautical community.

Tiles (Map pp754-5; ☎ 558 1507; 1 St Andrew Sq) An atmospheric spot with grand fit-out that's a good option when Café Royal Circle Bar is packed.

Waterfront (☎ 554 7427; 1c Dock Pl, Leith) Dark and atmospheric Leith wine bar with conservatory and terrace; check out the scent dispenser in the gents' loos!

ENTERTAINMENT

For full coverage buy the *List* (£2.20), a fortnightly magazine with listings for theatre, cinema, clubs and also kids' events.

Cinemas

Cameo (Map pp750-1; ☎ 228 4141; 38 Home St; tickets £5.90) Art-house and mainstream films.

Filmhouse (Map pp754-5; ☎ 228 2688; 88 Lothian Rd; tickets £5.80) Shows art-house, classic and foreign films, and hosts the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Edinburgh's dynamic gay scene is concentrated on the 'pink triangle' around Greenside Pl and upper Broughton St. Venues here are both gay- and lesbian-friendly. The Blue Moon Café (see p766) is a quieter meeting spot, where you can browse the informative *Scotsgay* magazine (www.scotsgay.co.uk).

CC Blooms (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 9331; 23 Greenside Pl; 🕒 10.30pm-3am) Still the queen of Edinburgh's scene, CC's serves up music from disco cheese to meaty beats. Free admission means it can get very crowded.

Planet Out (Map pp750-1; ☎ 524 0061; 6 Baxter's Pl, Leith Walk; 🕒 4pm-1am Mon-Fri, 2pm-1am Sat & Sun) During the week it's a chilled spot, but on weekends there's a party crowd at this younger joint.

Live Music

While pubs offer the odd strumming guitarist or lazy DJ to break up their trivia nights, Edinburgh has several venues dedicated to music.

Bannerman's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 556 3254; 212 Cowgate) Below the Royal Mile, this atmospheric boozer has live music nearly every night, usually unsigned local rockers.

Royal Oak (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 2976; www.royal-oak-folk.com; 1 Infirmary St) The folk-music flagship of Edinburgh, this is a gathering place for folk musicians with irregular sessions. You're guaranteed a gig on Sundays from 8.30pm when the Wee Folk Club plays (admission £3).

Queen's Hall (Map pp750-1; ☎ 668 2019; www.thequeenshall.net; Clerk St; tickets £10-24; 🕒 box office 10am-5.30pm) Home to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, this venue also hosts jazz concerts, tribute bands and a whole range of other events.

Other recommendations:

Henry's Jazz Cellar (Map pp754-5; ☎ 538 7385; 8 Morrison St; 🕒 Tue-Sun until 3am) There's jazz six nights a week at this basement joint that attracts trad-jazz fans.

Liquid Room (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 2564; www.liquidroom.com; 9c Victoria St; 🕒 Tue-Sun) Attracts a good mix of acts from the Misfits to Hayseed Dixie and also hosts T Break heats (see the boxed text, p796) and T on the Fringe, plus some good club nights.

Whistlebinkies (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 5114; 4 South Bridge) This late-night drinking den has live music nightly and Monday night open-mic jams.

Nightclubs

Edinburgh club nights range from ice-cold cool to kitschy fun. Cover charges range from £5 to £15 and most venues stay open until 3am.

Ego (Map pp750-1; ☎ 478 7434; 14 Picardy Pl; 🕒 nightly) Ever the glamour puss, Ego is all about shaking it to music from happy hardcore to disco anthems. The ever-popular Vegas is a 'sleazy listening' soiree held monthly on a Saturday.

Cabaret Voltaire (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 6176; www.thecabaretvoltaire.com; 36 Blair St; admission from £2; 🕒 from 9pm) Hosting local and visiting DJs with a great range of club nights (from Latin to drum 'n' bass), this two-room club works hard to keep Edinburgh hot and sweaty.

Stereo (Map pp754-5; ☎ 229 9438; www.clubstereo.co.uk; 28 King's Stables Rd) Concentrating on cheap drinks as much as the music, this place attracts a young, alco-popping crowd. The tunes are chart, pop, house and disco cheese.

Venue (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 3073; www.edinvenue.com; 17-23 Calton Rd) Where there's sticky floors and scuffed furniture you know you're in the safe hands of a reliable club. This vast, bare-brick spot hosts an older crowd who like their laid-back Latin funk, electro and disco.

Other recommendations:

Bongo Club (Map pp750-1; ☎ 558 7604; www.thebongoclub.co.uk; 37 Holyrood Rd; 🕒 nightly) This place claims to 'put the cult back into culture', bashing out beats from dub, funk and hip-hop.

Honeycomb (Map pp754-5; ☎ 530 5540; 15 Niddry St) In the old vaults under South Bridge, this spot does top drum'n'bass as well as funk.

Sport

Edinburgh's football clubs are strongly supported. **Hibernian** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 661 2159; www.hibs.co.uk; Easter Rd Stadium, Albion Pl), the pride of Leith and known as Hibs or the Hibees, traditionally draws its support from the city's Catholic community, while **Hearts** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 200 7201; www.heartsfc.co.uk; Tynecastle Stadium, Gorgie Rd), nicknamed the Jambos, represents the other side.

Edinburgh heaves during the season of rugby internationals. The Six Nations tournament runs from January to March, and Edinburgh's home games are played at **Murrayfield Stadium** (☎ 346 5000; www.sru.org.uk; 112 Roseburn St), west of Haymarket. It can be difficult to get accommodation over these weekends.

Theatre

Edinburgh has more than its fair share of theatres, mostly because of the frantic festival activity.

Edinburgh Festival Theatre (Map pp754-5; ☎ 529 6000; www.eft.co.uk; 13-29 Nicolson St) From ballet to folk music from around the world.

Royal Lyceum Theatre (Map pp754-5; ☎ 248 4848; www.lyceum.org.uk; 30 Grindlay St) High-quality drama, concerts and ballet.

Stand (Map pp754-5; ☎ 558 7272; www.thestand.co.uk; 5 York Pl; 🕒 nightly) Atmospheric comedy venue with shows every night.

Traverse Theatre (Map pp754-5; ☎ 228 1404; www.traverse.co.uk; 10 Cambridge St) Top-class venue staging an exciting programme of drama and dance.

SHOPPING

Most of the high-street brands are represented on Princes St and the massive **Ocean Terminal** (☎ 555 8888; www.oceanterminal.com; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) has several more chains. For boutiques or more-quirky shopping, hit Cockburn and Victoria Sts in the Old Town, or Stockbridge, particularly St Stephen St.

Clothing

21st Century Kilts (Map pp754-5; ☎ 557 0256; www.21stcenturykilt.com; 555 Castlehill) This funky outlet updates the kilt for the new millennium, with previous shoppers including Robbie Williams and KT Tunstall.

Armstrong's (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 5557; 83 The Grassmarket) You'll find an excellent selection of secondhand retro/vintage clothing here. There is another branch at 64 Clerk St.

Leith Army Stores (Map pp750-1; ☎ 556 2337; 7 Brunswick Pl, Leith Walk) This well-stocked place packs in a good range of outdoor gear from survival saws to backpacks.

Joey D (Map pp750-1; ☎ 5576672 www.joey-d.co.uk; 54 Broughton St) This hip Edinburgh designer does mash-ups of clothing, grafting a panel from a tweed jacket to an army uniform – all very punk.

Department Stores

Harvey Nichols (Map pp754-5; ☎ 524 8388; 30 St Andrew Sq) Harvey Nicks is the place for a wide range of designers.

Jenners (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 2442; 48 Princes St) An Edinburgh institution, opened in 1838. Stocked with gifts, a wide range of clothing and much more in a gorgeous old building. The perfect place to buy travel-ready haggis.

Other Shops

Royal Mile Whiskies (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225 3383; 379 High St) Although packed with tourists, this shop has a great selection (though prices may be cheaper at an off-licence).

Fopp (Map pp754-5; ☎ 220 0133; 55 Cockburn St) This cheap record and book shop is an Edinburgh success story, now expanding into Glasgow.

Avalanche Records (www.avalancherecords.co.uk) West Nicholson St (Map pp754-5; ☎ 668 2374; 17 West Nicholson St); Cockburn St (☎ 225 3939; 63 Cockburn St); Dundas St (☎ 332 209934; Dundas St) This indie record store specialises in used, vinyl and hard-to-find. There are three branches across the city, but Cockburn St is the best.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Edinburgh airport (☎ 333 1000; www.edinburghairport.com), 7 miles west of Edinburgh, has services to other cities in the UK, Ireland and Continental Europe. The main airlines servicing the city are **British Airways** (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.ba.com), **British Midland** (☎ 0870 600 6868; www.flybmi.com) and **easyJet** (☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com). These airlines have domestic services from London, Bristol and Manchester, among others, and British Midland, British Airways and their subsidiaries offer flights to many other Scottish destinations such as Shetland, Inverness, Stornoway and Orkney.

Bus

Edinburgh's St Andrew Sq bus station (Map pp754–5) is on the northeastern side of the square. There are frequent daily links to/from many cities in England and Wales, with fares from London particularly competitive.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs to London (from £33 return, 9½ hours, up to four daily). There are also services to Newcastle (£14, 2¾ hours, three to five daily) and York (£28.50, 5¾ hours, one daily).

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) buses connect Edinburgh with all of Scotland's major cities and towns, including Aberdeen (£16, 3¼ hours, hourly); Dundee (£9, 1¾ hours, 30 minutes); Fort William (£20, four hours, three daily); Glasgow (£4, 1¼ hours, 20 minutes); Inverness (£7, four hours, hourly); Portree (£27, eight hours, two daily) and Stirling (£4.20, one hour, hourly).

Stagecoach (☎ 01698 870 768; www.stagecoachbus.com) runs the Motorvator bus to Glasgow (£4, 1¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday).

Another budget operator is **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com), which has cheap bus fares (from as little as £1.50) from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Inverness and Perth.

See p969 for details of buses to Edinburgh from London and the rest of the UK.

Car & Motorcycle

The main approaches to Edinburgh become gridlocked very quickly at rush hour, so time your arrival and departure to avoid these periods.

Train

The main train station is Waverley (Map pp754–5), in the heart of the city, although most trains also stop at Haymarket station, which is convenient for the West End. You can buy tickets, make reservations and get travel information at the **Edinburgh Rail Travel Centre** (🕒 4.45am-12.30am Mon-Sat, 7am-12.30am Sun) in Waverley station.

First ScotRail (☎ 0845 601 5929; www.firstscotrail.com) has two northern lines from Edinburgh: one cuts north across the Grampians to Inverness (£32.90, 3½ hours, six to nine daily) and on to Thurso; the other follows the coast north around to Aberdeen (£32.90, 2½ hours, hourly or more frequently) and on to Inverness. There are trains every 15 to 30 minutes to Glasgow (£9, 50 minutes). For fare and timetable information, phone the **National Rail Enquiry Service** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk)

Virgin Trains (☎ 08457 222 333; www.virgintrains.co.uk) operates routes to Aberdeen (£9.50, 2¼ hours, half-hourly), Glasgow (£8.80, 50 minutes, quarter-hourly) and Dundee (£15.50, 1¼ hours, half-hourly), as well as selected cities in the UK.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Between 5am and midnight, Lothian Buses operates **Flybybus** (Bus 100; ☎ 555 6363; www.flybybus.com; one way/return £3.30/5), which drops off at Waverley St (30 minutes, every 15 minutes).

A taxi to the city centre costs £13.

Bicycle

Although there are plenty of steep hills to negotiate, Edinburgh is ideal for cycling (as nothing is more than half an hour away), the traffic is fairly tolerable and scenic Holyrood Park is close by. There are plenty of cycle lanes on the major streets.

Bike Trax (Map pp750-1; ☎ 228 6333; www.biketrax.co.uk; 11 Lochrin Pl; bike hire per day/week £12/70; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun) does good repairs as well as renting out sturdy mountain bikes.

Car & Motorcycle

Most of the big national operators have offices both in town or at the airport, but there's also **Arnold Clark** (Map pp750-1; ☎ 0845 607 4500; 13 Lochrin Pl; rental per day/week £23/110), a good local outfit.

Driving in Edinburgh is complicated by restricted access on Princes St, George St and Charlotte Sq, with many one-way streets and rare-as-hen's-teeth parking. There are large, long-stay car parks at the St James Centre, Greenside Pl, New St, Castle Tce and Morrison St. Motorcycles can be parked free at designated areas in the city centre.

Public Transport

The two main companies, **Lothian** (☎ 554 4494; www.lothianbuses.co.uk) and **First Edinburgh** (☎ 08708 72 72 71; www.firstedinburgh.co.uk), provide frequent, cheap services. You buy tickets when you board buses and for Lothian services you need exact change. For most short trips, the fare is 80p. A Day Saver ticket (£2.30, or £2 after 9.30am Monday to Friday, all day at weekends), available from bus drivers when you board, covers a whole day's travel. After midnight there are special night buses (£2). The free *Edinburgh Travelmap* is useful – it shows bus routes around the city and is available from the tourist office, or contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinescotland.com).

Taxi

There are numerous central taxi ranks; costs are reasonable and £6 gets you almost anywhere around the centre. Local companies include:

Capital Taxis (☎ 228 2555)
Central Radio Taxis (☎ 229 2468; www.taxis-edinburgh.co.uk)
City Cabs (☎ 228 1211; www.citycabs.co.uk)

AROUND EDINBURGH

EDINBURGH ZOO

Located 2.5 miles west of the city, this is one of the world's leading conservation **zoos** (☎ 0131-34 9171; www.edinburghzoo.org.uk; 134 Corstorphine Rd; adult/child £9/6; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct & Mar, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Feb). Its captive breeding programme has rescued species from extinction, including Siberian tigers, pygmy hippos and red pandas. Kids will love the capering of four different species of penguin in the world's biggest penguin pool, and the Lifelinks 'hands on' zoology centre.

SOUTH QUEENSFERRY & INCHCOLM

Eight miles west of Edinburgh, South Queensferry lolls on the Firth of Forth's southern bank. Named for the frequent crossings made by St Margaret in the 12th century as she commuted between her Edinburgh and Dunfermline palaces, South Queensferry's bridges have made the name an anachronism, with the magnificent **Forth Rail Bridge** one of Victorian engineering's finest monuments. It took seven years to complete and cost the lives of 58 workers to create this over-a-mile-long stretch. The adjacent Forth Rd Bridge is a graceful suspension bridge completed in 1964.

Offshore, tiny Inchcolm Island (only 800m long) houses Scotland's best-preserved assemblage of monastic buildings, including a medieval **abbey** (HS; ☎ 01383-823332; adult/child £3.30/1.30; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Easter-Sep), which was founded for Augustinian priors in 1123. Repeated English attacks during the 14th century necessitated a redesign in the 15th century, with only the octagonal chapterhouse, with its stone roof, surviving from the 13th century.

Maid of the Forth (☎ 0131-331 4857; www.maidoftheforth.co.uk; adult/child £13/4.50' ⌚ Jul-Sep, Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Oct) leaves (weather permitting) from Hawes Pier and cruises under the bridges to the island.

Frequent trains run from Edinburgh to South Queensferry's Dalmeny station (15 minutes). There are also numerous buses, including First Edinburgh bus 88, westbound from Princes St.

Hopetoun House

Two miles west of South Queensferry, **Hopetoun House** (☎ 0131-331 2451; www.hopetounhouse.com; house & grounds adult/child £8/4.25, grounds only £3.70/2.20; ⌚ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep; ♿) is one of Scotland's finest stately homes, with 150 acres of stunning landscaped grounds beside the Firth of Forth. There are two parts: the older built between 1699 and 1702 to Sir William Bruce's plans and dominated by a grand stairwell, the newer designed between 1720 and 1750 by William Adam and his sons, Robert and John. Lavishly furnished, the house is also known for its art collection, which includes paintings by Gainsborough, Ramsay and Raeburn.

NEWHAVEN

Immediately to the west of Leith, Newhaven was founded by James IV as another shipbuilding centre in 1511, but the port became a fishing community whose fishwives walked to Edinburgh selling herring from wicker creels on their backs. Modern development has dispelled the fishing village, with flats fighting for the water frontage with old cottages and terraces.

A beachside stroll is the best way to see the town, and if you want to get below the surface the old fish-market building beside the little harbour now houses the informative **Newhaven Heritage Museum** (☎ 0131-551 4165; 24 Pier Pl; admission free; ⌚ noon-4.45pm). This small museum is tricked out with tableaux celebrating the lives of Newhaven fisherfolk and the town's stint as a naval dockyard. A 15-minute video illustrates the hard-working lifestyle that survived here until the 1950s, when overfishing put paid to the traditional source of income.

Buses 7, 10, 11 or 16 all head to Newhaven.

CRAIGMILLAR CASTLE

If you're after a crowd-free Scottish fortress, try **Craigmillar Castle** (HS; ☎ 0131-661 4445; Craigmillar Castle Rd; adult/child £3/1.20; ⌚ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar). Dating from the 15th century, the tower house was based on David's Tower in Edinburgh Castle. Mary Queen of Scots took refuge here after the murder of her possible lover Rizzio; it was here too that plans to murder her husband Darnley were laid. Look for the prison cell complete with built-in sanitation, something some 'modern' British prisons only finally managed in 1996.

The castle is 3.5 miles southeast of the city centre. Take bus 33 eastbound from Princes St to Old Dalkeith Rd and walk 500m up Craigmillar Castle Rd.

ROSSLYN CHAPEL

Even with the hype of *The Da Vinci Code* film/book/lunchbox, this **chapel** (☎ 0131-440 2159; adult/concession/child £7/6/free; ⌚ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.45pm Sun) is one of the most uniquely beautiful in the British Isles.

Built in 1446 by William St Clair, Rosslyn is celebrated for its magnificent carvings, including biblical figures, examples of the pagan 'Green Man', and flowers, vines and imagery of plants apparently from America, which oddly pre-date Columbus' arrival. Rich in Templar and Masonic connections, it's no wonder the building has been central to many conspiracy theories, including that the Holy Grail or the body of Christ are buried beneath the chapel.

While prices have increased after the chapel's star turn, be thankful you're not paying the reputed £7000-a-day location fee of the 2006 movie; much of this windfall is being put towards restoration. You should also climb the stairs to the gantry around the chapel, which affords new perspectives on the building as well as the surrounding countryside and village, which is famously where Dolly the sheep was cloned. There's another bestselling novel in the Knights Templar getting involved in cloning.

Bus 15A runs from St Andrews Sq to Roslin village (£1 single, 30 minutes, hourly Monday to Friday, every two hours Saturday and twice a day Sunday). To drive take the A701 south and turn off in Bilston onto the B006 for Roslin.

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Destination Great Britain

Britain is perfect for exploring, for acting on a whim, for having an adventure, for doing exactly what you want to do. Find a delightful village as you're touring the coast? Check into that friendly inn overlooking the harbour. See a dramatic castle on the skyline? Turn off the road and stroll round dramatic battlements. Love the hip hotel in the city? Stay another night. Or two. Sure, you'll make some plans in advance – especially if time is tight – but you can leave things to chance as well, enjoying the excitement that only freedom can provide.

And along with freedom, Britain offers variety. You can immerse yourself in history at the Tower of London, or marvel at modern architecture in Manchester. You can eat fish and chips from a paper tray in Whitby, or relish the delights of Celtic fusion cuisine in Cardiff. You can walk on a wild mountain near Loch Ness or enjoy Edinburgh's energetic nightlife. Travel chameleons love it. And however familiar things may seem, in Britain there's always something unexpected.

You might be from far-flung regions, or maybe you're exploring your own back yard. Either way, this book is for you. We've picked the places we think are best, but there's much more we couldn't fit in. So use this book as a guide – to steer you from place to place – and mix it with your own discoveries. In Britain, you won't be disappointed.

THIS IMAGE
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

Getting Started

Here's a handy slogan to remember while you're planning your trip: travel in Britain is a breeze. Granted, it may not be totally effortless, but it's easy compared with many parts of the world. In this compact country you're never far from the next town, the next pub, the next national park or the next impressive castle on your hit list of highlights.

WHEN TO GO

Any visitor to Britain will soon understand the locals' obsession with weather. Extremes of hot or cold are rare, but variation is constant. The key word is *changeable:* the weather can be bad one minute, great the next. It wouldn't be unusual in April, for example, for the morning to be warm enough for T-shirts, lunch time to be cloudy, the afternoon see a dash of rain and drop in temperature, and the day polished off by a dump of snow in the evening.

Despite apparent randomness, there is a seasonal pattern. Rain falls less often in summer (June to August), and there's normally more sunshine, although there'll be cloudy days too. Conversely, winter (November to February) may enjoy fantastic clear spells between bouts of snow, while spring (March to May) or autumn (September to October) can sometimes produce the best weather of the year. There are also variations over distance: southern England might be chilly, while northern Scotland enjoys a heat wave. Or vice versa. Be prepared for anything and you won't get a surprise.

For more weather facts and figures, see the climate charts on p954.

With all that in mind, May to September is undoubtedly the best period to travel in Britain. July and August are busiest (it's school holiday time), especially in coastal towns, national parks, and historic cities like Oxford, Edinburgh and York. In April and October you take a chance on the weather but avoid crowds, although some hotels and attractions close mid-October to Easter, and tourist offices have limited hours.

Overall, the least hospitable months for visitors are November to February. It's cold in the south, very cold in the north, and days are short. In Scotland, north Wales and the hills of northern England, roads can sometimes be closed by snow. Reaching the islands off the Scottish mainland (and occasionally other parts of Britain) can also be a problem as high winds disrupt ferry services.

For winter visits, London and the big cities are an exception – they're busy all the time, with such a lot to see the weather is immaterial. Besides, you're almost as likely to have a damp day in June as you are in January…

COSTS & MONEY

If you're a global traveller, whatever your budget you'll know that Britain is expensive compared with many other countries. But don't let that put you off. If funds are tight you'll still have a great trip with some forward planning, a bit of shopping around and a modicum of common sense. A lot of stuff is cheap or good value, and some is completely free. The following gives some guidelines; for more details see the Directory and Transport chapters.

COSTS FOR KIDS

Taking your children into museums and historic sites can be absolutely free, half-price, or just a bit cheaper than the adult cost, so we've detailed kids' rates throughout this book (as well as adult prices). At camp sites and self-catering hostels, children usually pay about 50% to 75% of the adult rate. At hotels, children aged between two and 12 years old usually get 50% to 75% discount. Kids under this age usually stay free of charge, while over-12s (or over-16s at some places) attract the full rate, on the assumption that growing children need a bed and will probably eat as much as their parents.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT…

Travel in Britain is not like crossing the Sahara or exploring the Amazon. Anything can be bought as you go. Our advice is to take only what you absolutely need, which may include the following:

- rain jacket
- comfortable shoes
- small day-pack (for carrying that rain jacket when the sun shines)
- a taste for beer that isn't icy cold
- listening skills and a sense of humour

For midrange travellers, basic hotels are about £20 to £50 per person, except in London, where midrange hotels start at around £80, and around £100 gets you something pretty decent for the night, although you could easily spend more. When it comes to eating, a decent three-course meal with wine in a smart restaurant will set you back about £20 to £30 per person. In London this jumps to about £50, although if you choose carefully you can still get a great meal (with a glass or two of wine) for around £25. Of course, you can go wild at somewhere outrageously posh or trendy, and not get much change from £125.

Backpackers on a tight budget need £30 a day for bare survival in London, with dorm beds from £15, basic sustenance £10, and transport around £5 unless you prefer to hoof it.

Whatever your bracket, extras in London might include clubbing (£5 to £10, up to £20 at weekends), a pint in a pub (£2.50 to £3) or admission to museums and galleries (£10 to £20 a day, though many places don't charge).

Out of London, costs drop. Shoestringers need around £25 per day for hostels and food. Midrangers will be fine on £50 to £75 per day, allowing £20 to £30 per person for B&B accommodation, £10 to £15 for lunch, snacks and drinks, £10 to £20 for an evening meal. Admission fees are the same for everyone – work on £10 per day.

Travel costs depend on transport choice. Trains can cost anything from £5 to £50 per 100 miles, depending when you buy your ticket. Long-distance buses (called coaches in Britain) cost about half the train fare for an equivalent journey. Car drivers should allow £10 per 100 miles for fuel, plus around £5 per day for parking. Rental costs £20 to £50 per day, depending on model and duration.

HOW MUCH?

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

B&B £20 per person

CD £12

The *Times* (newspaper) 50p

Restaurant meal £15 per person

Large latte £2

TRAVEL LITERATURE

There's nothing like a decent travelogue to set the mood for your own trip. The choice of books about travel in Britain can be daunting, so here's a list of our favourites to add an extra dimension to your planning or help you dig under the British skin a little when you're on the road (arranged roughly chronologically).

- *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* by Laurie Lee is a classic English travelogue. A young man literally walks out of the time-warped 1930s Cotswolds, then carves out a life in London – before heading off to Spain.
- *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson, although based on travels in the 1970s, is still incisive. This American author really captures the

TOP TENS

Must-See Movies

Predeparture planning is no chore if it includes a trip to the cinema or a night on the sofa with a DVD and a bowl of popcorn. Our parameters for a 'British' film? Anything about Britain. Anything that gives a taste of history, scenery or peculiar cultural traits. For reviews of these and other cinematic gems, see p72.

- *Brief Encounter* (1945) Director: David Lean
- *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) Director: Henry Cornelius
- *Trainspotting* (1996) Director: Danny Boyle
- *Brassed Off* (1996) Director: Mark Herman
- *The Full Monty* (1997) Director: Peter Cattaneo
- *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) Director: John Madden
- *Billy Elliot (*2000) Director: Stephen Daldry
- *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) Director: Gurinder Chadha
- *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) Director: Joe Wright
- *Love + Hate* (2006) Director: Dominic Savage

Rave Reads

Travel broadens the mind. Especially if you read before you go. For a taste of life in Britain, try a few of these novels – from past classics to contemporary milestones. For more details on these and other great books, see p68.

- *Oliver Twist* (1837) Charles Dickens
- *Wuthering Heights* (1847) Emily Brontë
- *The Trumpet Major* (1895) Thomas Hardy
- *The Rainbow* (1915) DH Lawrence
- *How Green Was My Valley* (1939) Richard Llewellyn
- *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1962) Muriel Spark
- *Waterland* (1983) Graham Swift
- *Brick Lane* (2003) Monica Ali
- *Small Island* (2004) Andrea Levy
- *The Book of Dave* (2006) Will Self

Favourite Festivals

Serious opera, fringe comedy, world music, drama, poetry or dancing your head off in the rain. Whatever you're into, there's a festival to weave your travels around. Here's a list of our favourites. For more details and inspiration see the individual town and city sections throughout this book, and the festivals list on p956.

- Bath International Music Festival (Bath) May – see p260
- Brighton Festival (Brighton) May – see p236
- Bradford Mela (Bradford, Yorkshire) June – see p513
- Glastonbury Festival (Glastonbury, Somerset) June – see p269
- Womad (Reading, Berkshire) July – see p957
- International Eisteddfod (Llangollen) July – see p717
- T in the Park (Balado) July – see p796
- Edinburgh International Festival (Edinburgh) August – see p761
- Notting Hill Carnival (London) August – see p153
- The Big Chill (Herefordshire) August – see p393

spirit of Britain three decades ago. When he pokes fun he's spot on, so the locals don't mind.

- *Lights Out for the Territory* by Iain Sinclair is a darkly funny, entertaining and acerbic exploration of 1990s London, taking in – among other things – Jeffrey Archer's penthouse and an East End gangster funeral.
- *Native Stranger* by Alistair Scott describes the author's journey through Scotland, a homeland he hardly knew after decades of globetrotting journalism. Slightly dated, but it remains incisive and deep.

- *On Borrow's Trail* by Hugh Oliff retraces the journeys through Wales made by 19th-century writer George Borrow, combining a rich synopsis of the original observations with modern photos and colour illustrations.
- *Park and Ride* by Miranda Sawyer is a wry and minutely observed 2001 sojourn through English suburbia, the land of never-ending home improvements and keeping up appearances.
- *Two Degrees West* by Nicholas Crane describes a walk in a perfectly straight line (two degrees west of the Greenwich meridian) across Britain, wading rivers, cutting through towns, sleeping in fields and meeting an astounding selection of people along the way.
- *Slow Coast Home* by Josie Drew is a cross between journal of miscellany and chatty letter to a friend, as the globetrotting cyclist completes a 5000-mile tour of England and Wales.
- *Great British Bus Journeys* by David McKie is a wry and witty travelogue showing that 'unknown' towns and villages can be just as fascinating as tourist hot spots.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet is a wonderful planning tool for travellers, and there are millions of sites about Britain. Before plunging into the cyber-maze, try these for starters:

Able to Go (www.abletogo.com) Excellent listings for visitors with mobility difficulties.

Arts Festivals (www.artsfestivals.co.uk) Listing over 100 festivals around Britain: opera, theatre, literature, comedy, classical, folk, jazz and more.

Backpax (www.backpaxmag.com) Cheerful info on cheap travel, visas, activities and work.

BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) Immense and invaluable site from the world's best broadcaster.

eFestivals (www.efestivals.co.uk) News, confirmed (and rumoured) artists, tickets and updates from the lively world of rock, pop, dance and world music gatherings.

i-UK (www.i-uk.com) Official site for all business, study and travel information.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Loads of travel news, a bit of merchandise, and the legendary Thorn Tree bulletin board.

UK Student Life (www.ukstudentlife.com) Language courses, and where to go outside study time.

Visit Britain (www.visitbritain.com) The country's official tourism website; accommodation, attractions, events and much more.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

HOORAY FOR HIGHLIGHTS One to Two Weeks / London to Cambridge

This is an unashamed tour of Britain's top tourist attractions. Yes, some can get crowded, but it's for a reason – they're stunningly scenic or rich in history.

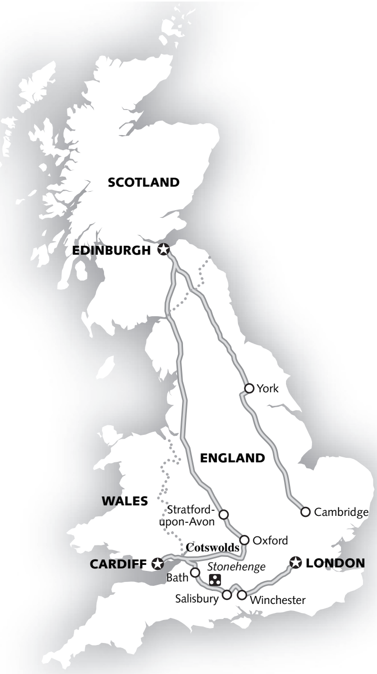
Start with spectacular, irrepressible **London** (p112), then visit ancient cathedral cities **Winchester** (p210) and **Salisbury** (p286). Next, a site of even older religion: prehistoric **Stonehenge** (p289); and onwards to **Bath** (p256) for Roman remains and grand Georgian architecture.

Loop over to **Cardiff** (p645) for fantastical castles and nautical heritage, and cruise through the rural **Cotswolds** (p356) to reach university town **Oxford** (p344) and Shakespeare's birthplace, **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422).

Then strike out north to **Edinburgh** (p747) for historic castles, new parliament and more tartan than you can shake a kilt at, before heading to **York** (p527) for its glorious cathedral and first-class train museum.

Finish at **Cambridge** (p459), another ancient university town, for more sightseeing and maybe a gentle punt on the river to recover from your whirlwind tour!

Without stopping much you could do this 1000-mile journey in a week. But pause to drink in the culture and history, not to mention the occasional beer in a country pub, and two weeks becomes a much better option.


SCOTLAND
EDINBURGH
York
ENGLAND
WALES
Stratford-upon-Avon
Cambridge
Oxford
Cotswolds
CARDIFF
Bath
Stonehenge
LONDON
Salisbury
Winchester

PASTORAL PLEASURES Three to Four Weeks / New Forest to Outer Hebrides

Britain may be small, and crowded in places, but there are some beautiful national parks and rural areas to enjoy.

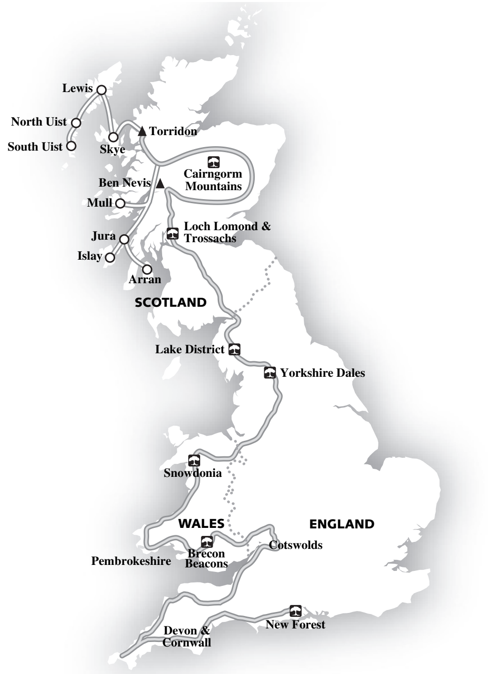
First stop, the **New Forest** (p219) for a spot of walking, cycling or horse riding, or simply relaxing, then to **Devon** (p295) and **Cornwall** (p315), which tempt with wild moors, grassy hills, and a beautiful coast of cliffs and sandy beaches.

The **Cotswolds** (p356) promise quintessential English countryside, with neat fields, clear rivers and endless pretty villages of honey-coloured stone – all glowing contentedly when the sun is out.

Head west again, to Wales, through the rolling hills of the **Brecon Beacons** (p693), and down to the heavenly sea and sky of **Pembrokeshire** (p675). Then go north to scale the stunning peaks of **Snowdonia** (p720), with mountains for walkers and steam trains for all the family.

Then it's back to England, through the valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales** (p517) and over the mountains of the **Lake District** (p591), to Scotland where two new national parks await: the glorious combination of **Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park** (p825), and the mountain wilderness of the **Cairngorms** (p879).

That may be wondrous enough, but Britain's pastoral pleasures are crowned by Scotland's famous Highlands and islands, where jewels include peaks like **Ben Nevis** (p885) and **Torridon** (p904), while out to sea the lovely islands – **Arran** (p816), **Islay** (p829), **Jura** (p831), **Mull** (p834), **Skye** (p905), **Lewis** (p913), **North Uist** (p918), **South Uist** (p918) and others – bask in the afternoon sun.


Lewis
North Uist
South Uist
Skye
Torridon
Cairngorm Mountains
Ben Nevis
Mull
Loch Lomond & Trossachs
Jura
Islay
Arran
SCOTLAND
Lake District
Yorkshire Dales
Snowdonia
WALES
ENGLAND
Cotswolds
Pembrokeshire
Brecon Beacons
New Forest
Devon & Cornwall

This is a tour to recharge your batteries and fill your lungs with fresh air. The main route is around 1300 miles, plus another 300 miles if you visit all the islands. Allow three weeks, or a month if you don't rush.

THE GRAND TOUR **One to Two Months / London to Cambridge (the long way)**

This is a trip for those with time, or an urge to see everything. So brace yourself, and let's be off.

From **London** (p112) aim for **Canterbury Cathedral** (p191), then head down the coast to hip and happening **Brighton** (p234), and across to historic cities **Winchester** (p210) and **Salisbury** p286) and the delightful **New Forest** (p219). Travel via prehistoric **Stonehenge** (p289) to Westcountry gems **Bath** (p256) and **Bristol** (p245).

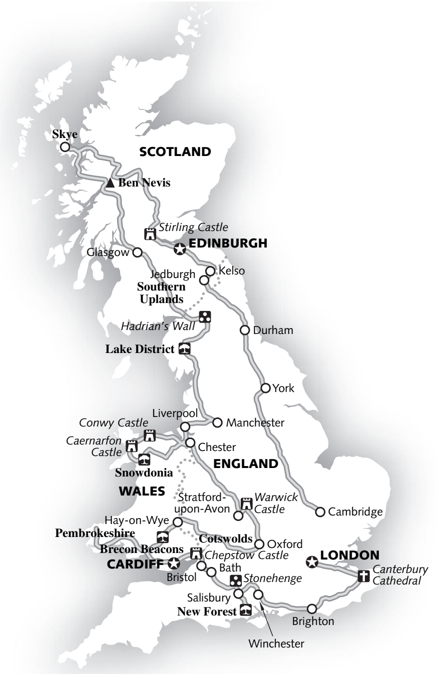
Next to Wales, via stunning **Chepstow Castle** (p665) and energetic **Cardiff** (p645), to the coastal paradise of **Pembrokeshire** (p675). Retrace to the **Brecon Beacons** (p693) and through book-mad **Hay-on-Wye** (p703) to reach the cosy **Cotswolds** (p356), charming **Oxford** (p344), spectacular **Warwick Castle** (p420), and Shakespeare's birthplace **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422).

Continue north to **Chester** (p568), then divert into north Wales for grand castles at **Conwy** (p737) and **Caernarfon** (p740), and equally stunning mountains of **Snowdonia** (p720). Then ferry across the Mersey to **Liverpool** (p571) and to **Manchester** (p556) for a taste of city life, followed by a change of scenery in the **Lake District** (p591) and a journey back in time along **Hadrian's Wall** (p632).

Hop across the border to Scotland, via the tranquil southern Uplands countryside and **border towns** (p801), to good-time **Glasgow** (p784). Then trek to **Ben Nevis** (p885), from where it's easy to reach for **Skye** (p905).

Time to head south again, via **Stirling Castle** (p839) to **Edinburgh** (p747), through the abbey border-towns of **Kelso** (p805) and **Jedburgh** (p806), to reach World Heritage Site **Durham** (p627) and the ancient Viking capital of **York** (p527), ending with a final flourish in beautiful **Cambridge** (p459).

This energetic pack-it-in loop is over 2000 miles. If you don't want to hurry, just leave out a few places. With even more time, you could expand the trip to include Devon and Cornwall, Norfolk and Suffolk, Mid Wales or the east coast of Scotland.



Skye
SCOTLAND
Ben Nevis
Stirling Castle
EDINBURGH
Glasgow
Kelso
Jedburgh
Southern Uplands
Hadrian's Wall
Durham
Lake District
York
Liverpool
Conwy Castle
Manchester
Caernarfon Castle
Chester
Snowdonia
ENGLAND
WALES
Stratford-upon-Avon
Warwick Castle
Cambridge
Hay-on-Wye
Pembrokeshire
Cotswolds
Oxford
Brecon Beacons
Chepstow Castle
LONDON
CARDIFF
Bath
Canterbury Cathedral
Bristol
Stonehenge
Salisbury
New Forest
Brighton
Winchester

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

URBAN ODYSSEY **One to Two Weeks / Bristol to Manchester**

If you want to dig under Britain's skin a little, take this ride through some of the country's less well-known and revitalised cities.

Kick off in **Bristol** (p245), once a poor cousin to neighbour Bath, today with fierce pride, a rich historic legacy and a music scene that rivals cool northern outposts. Next stop **Birmingham** (p408), a city that oozes transformation, with a renovated waterside, energised museums and a space-age shopping centre. Nearby is **Nottingham** (p435), forever associated with Robin Hood but renowned today for some very merry nightlife. If hitting the dance floor isn't your thing, relax in the city's great pubs. But don't dawdle. Down your pint. We're off again – to culturally restyled and famously to-the-hilt party town **Newcastle-upon-Tyne** (p618).

Still want more? It's got to be **Glasgow** (p784). Sign up here for pubs and clubs, some truly electric venues, fabulous galleries and – only in Scotland – slick but unpretentious bars.

Pausing for coffee and toast, head next for **Liverpool** (p571). The Beatles are done to death, but there are lively *current* music venues and rich trade-port heritage – plus a rather famous football team.

Finish in **Manchester** (p556), self-styled 'Barcelona of Britain', a longtime hotbed of musical endeavour, with thriving arts and club scenes, galleries a go-go, dramatic new architecture and – oh yes – another well-known football team.

SCOTLAND
Glasgow
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Liverpool
Manchester
Nottingham
Birmingham
WALES
ENGLAND
Bristol

In theory you could do this 725-mile street trip in a week, but Britain's cities may tempt you to linger longer. Better to allow at least 10 days. Two weeks would be even better. Don't say we didn't warn you…

RURAL RETREATS

Two to Three Weeks / Norfolk to Fife

For some of Britain's best-known national parks and natural beauties, see p29; this fabulous jaunt takes you through less frequented (but no less scenic) countryside.

Surprisingly close to London sit the tranquil counties of **Norfolk** (p479) and **Suffolk** (p472), their coastlines dotted with picturesque harbours, shingle beaches, salt marshes, bird reserves and the occasional old-fashioned seaside resort. Inland lie rivers and lakes, pretty villages and endless miles of flat countryside perfect for gentle cycling.

Next to **Wiltshire** (p285), best known for Stonehenge and Salisbury but also a rural delight of quiet country lanes and tranquil villages, plus the hills of the southern Cotswolds – low-key and less frequented than their northern counterparts in Gloucestershire.

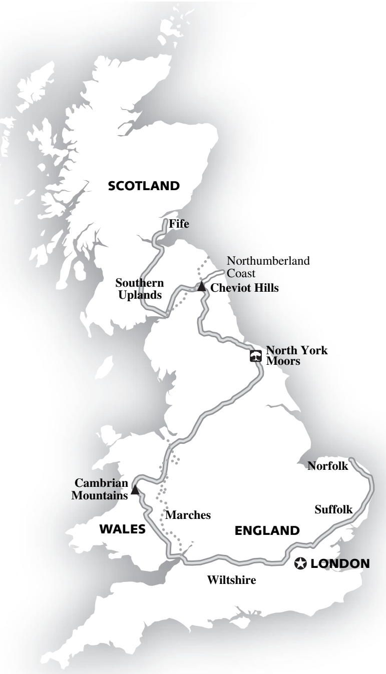
Between England and Wales lie the farmlands and cider orchards of the **Marches** (p381), while over the border loom the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales (p691) – big, wild and rarely on tourist itineraries. Put them on yours!

Then it's back to England and the **North York Moors** (p544), with heather-covered hills and delightful dales. Not far away, the **Northumberland Coast** (p637) is famous for empty beaches, dramatic castles and delicious crab sandwiches.

Inland sit the wild and empty big-sky landscapes of the **Cheviot Hills** and **Northumberland National Park** (p641), blending into the undulating hills, green valleys, stately homes, ruined abbeys and ancient **border towns** (p801) of southern Scotland.

For a final fling, cross the Firth of Forth to reach the 'kingdom' of **Fife** (p845), with lush rolling farmland ideal for cycling and a delightful coastline peppered with quaint harbours, perfect for an after-lunch stroll.

You could see these 'hidden' parts of Britain in two weeks if you don't stop much, covering about 1000 miles. Allow three weeks if you plan to wear your hiking boots, or want to relax over tea and cake, and catch a little local flavour off the beaten track.


SCOTLAND
Fife
Northumberland Coast
Southern Uplands
Cheviot Hills
North York Moors
Norfolk
Cambrian Mountains
Suffolk
Marches
WALES
ENGLAND
LONDON
Wiltshire

TAILORED TRIPS

BRITAIN ON LOCATION

Love the movies? Here are a few places where you can visit the set.

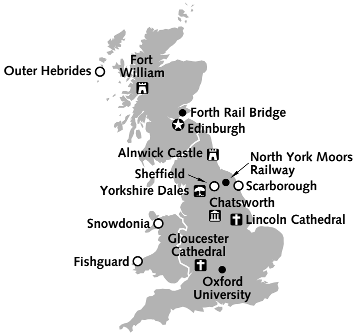
Britain's best-loved film hero Harry Potter gets around – locations in recent films include **Gloucester Cathedral** (p366), **Oxford University** (p345), **Alnwick Castle** (p637), **North York Moors Railway** (p549) and **Fort William** (p884).

In Scotland, landmark Hitchcock thriller *The 39 Steps* features the **Forth Rail Bridge** (p771), comedy *Whisky Galore* was set in the **Outer Hebrides** (p912), **Edinburgh** (p747) is the scene for tartan-noir masterpiece *Trainspotting,* while **Dunnottar Castle** (p865) was the backdrop for Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*.

In Wales, the Dylan Thomas classic *Under Milk Wood* was filmed in **Fishguard** (p686) in Pembrokeshire, while some of Lara Croft's unfeasibly epic *Tomb Raider* adventures were shot in **Snowdonia** (p720).

In northern England, quirky *Little Voice* was filmed in **Scarborough** (p541), *Calendar Girls* in the scenic valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales** (p517), and late-'90s hit *The Full Monty* in former steel-city **Sheffield** (p503).

For the latest film version of *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen power comes to Derbyshire; the stately home of **Chatsworth** (p455) plays Darcy's family abode, while dramatic Peak District outcrops provide a perfect spot for the heroine's love-lost contemplation. For *The Da Vinci Code* **Lincoln Cathedral** (p491) stood in for Westminster, and visitor numbers doubled overnight.


Outer Hebrides
Fort William
Forth Rail Bridge
Edinburgh
Alnwick Castle
North York Moors Railway
Sheffield
Yorkshire Dales
Scarborough
Chatsworth
Lincoln Cathedral
Snowdonia
Gloucester Cathedral
Fishguard
Oxford University

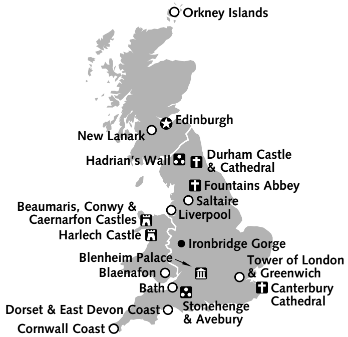
BRITAIN'S WORLD HERITAGE

Unesco's World Heritage Sites have great environmental or cultural significance. There are around 700 sites globally, and around 20 in Britain – together making up a great itinerary of highlights and unexpected treasures.

Obvious contenders include the **Tower of London** (p142), the historical maritime sites of **Greenwich** (p150), the ancient megaliths of **Stonehenge** (p289) and **Avebury** (p293), and the Roman-Georgian city of **Bath** (p256). Less obvious, but just as valid, sites include the industrial heritage of **Blaenafon** (p666) and **Ironbridge Gorge** (p397), the mills of **Saltaire** (p514) and the waterfront of **Liverpool** (p571), while the coast of **Dorset** (p274) and **East Devon** (p300) is one of the few natural sites on this list.

Back to the classics, and in the south of England there's **Blenheim Palace** (p354) and **Canterbury Cathedral** (p191), while the north boasts **Fountains Abbey** (p538). In Wales, the castles of **Caernarfon** (p740), **Conwy** (p737), **Beaumaris** (p742) and **Harlech** (p731) together form one site, as do **Durham Castle** (p629) and **Durham Cathedral** (p628). In Scotland, sites include **Edinburgh's Old Town** (p752) and **New Town** (p758), **New Lanark** (p800), and the Neolithic sites of the **Orkney Islands** (p919).

Recent additions to the list include **Hadrian's Wall** (p632) and the landscape and industrial heritage of the coast of **Cornwall** (p315). For more details see www.culture.gov.uk/historic_environment/World_Heritage.htm


Orkney Islands
Edinburgh
New Lanark
Hadrian's Wall
Durham Castle & Cathedral
Fountains Abbey
Saltaire
Beaumaris, Conwy & Caernarfon Castles
Liverpool
Harlech Castle
Ironbridge Gorge
Blenheim Palace
Tower of London & Greenwich
Blaenafon
Bath
Canterbury Cathedral
Dorset & East Devon Coast
Stonehenge & Avebury
Cornwall Coast

BRITAIN'S BEST BEACHES

In Cornwall, art fans and adrenaline-seekers love **St Ives** (p328) while surfers and beach-bums dig **Newquay** (p331). Next-door Devon boasts more seaside favourites, including **Croyde** (p308) and **Torquay** (p300).

Dorset's **Portland harbour** (p282) is perfect for water sports, and will be the base for the 2012 Olympic sailing races. Yachties also enjoy the golden shores of the **Isle of Wight** (p222), along with the bucket-and-spade brigade.

In southeast England, **Brighton** (p234) boasts hip beachfront bars, while **Ramsgate** (p197) has abundant maritime history and **Whitstable** (p195) satisfies any cravings for seafood.

In Wales, **St David's** (p683) and the Gower's **Rhossili Bay** (p672) have decent surf. Broad sands sweep the coast near **Barmouth** (p732) and the otherworldly **Llŷn Peninsula** (p743), while traditional seaside resorts include **Llandudno** (p734) and **Tenby** (p678).

Sanday
Durness
Harris
North Uist
South Uist
St Andrews
Whitby
Scarborough
Llandudno
Skegness
Llŷn Peninsula
Barmouth
Southwold
Aldeburgh
St David's
Rhossili Bay
Whitstable
Tenby
Isle of Wight
Ramsgate
Croyde
Brighton
Newquay
St Ives
Torquay
Portland Harbour

In Scotland, the big waves of **Durness** (p900) attract serious surfers, while historic **St Andrews** (p846) boasts two fabulous strands. The isles of **Harris** (p916), **North Uist** (p918), **South Uist** (p918) and Orkney's **Sanday** (p931) have awe-inspiring beaches.

Yorkshire boasts charmingly old-fashioned **Scarborough** (p541) and gothic-festival-port-resort **Whitby** (p549). Nearby is **Skegness** (p498) – dubbed Skeggie-Vegas by admirers.

In Suffolk, historic **Aldeburgh** (p477) has a shingle shore and fine dining, while wonderfully quaint **Southwold** (p478) offers prom, pier and lighthouse, and some of the most expensive sheds (sorry, highly prized beach chalets) in the country.

BRITAIN FOR KIDS

'Are we nearly there yet?' Travel through England with offspring in tow needn't be arduous. Certainly not if you visit some of these places:

London (p153) justifiably tops nearly every list – with a mesmerising choice of kid-friendly attractions. Bristol has **Explore** (p248), an interactive science museum bursting with hands-on exhibits, while Cardiff has fairy-tale **castles** (p647) and up-to-the-moment **Techniquest** (p650).

For more battlements, there's **Warwick Castle** (p420) in Warwick. Knights in armour? You bet. And children of a ghoulish disposition can creep around the dungeons. It's a short distance, but a leap across centuries, to the **National Space Centre** (p431). Highlights include zero-gravity toilets and germ-devouring underpants. Kids love it. And it *is* rocket science.

Dundee
Glasgow
Edinburgh
National Space Centre
Alton Towers
Cadbury World
Warwick Castle
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Hungry after crossing the galaxy? **Cadbury World** (p412) in Birmingham is a lip-smacking exploration of chocolate production and consumption. Just make sure those samples settle in tiny tummies before you reach **Alton Towers** (p428), Britain's finest theme park, with a stomach-churning selection of roller coasters and other thrills.

Glasgow's ultramodern **Science Centre** (p788) is a bounty of discovery, complete with interactive science mall, and Dundee offers **Sensation** (p871) for more hands-on, and heads-in, activity.

Finish at **Our Dynamic Earth** (p756) in Edinburgh, a special-effects marvel recreating the planet's history from the Big Bang to tea time.

Snapshot

In the previous edition of this book, we wrote that British newspaper and TV coverage was dominated by events in Iraq. Two years on, in early 2007, we're writing *this* edition, and things don't seem to have changed much: Iraq still dominates the headlines in the British media, and frequently dominates discussions in the British parliament. And when it comes to public opinion in Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair's support for the original American-led invasion is now a very sore point indeed. Mr Blair is seen either as President George W Bush's puppet (or 'poodle', as the press love to have it) or a moderating force in a gung-ho environment, but either way Iraq goes from bad to worse, and pessimistic pundits close to the ground predict imminent civil war.

But that's not all. British forces are tied down in an equally ambiguous conflict in Afghanistan, and once again violent or distressing images on the TV news help call the whole affair into question. Add to that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East – notably the mid-2006 outbreak of fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah militias in Lebanon, where Britain's call for a ceasefire was conspicuous by its absence – and those are just some of the international issues Tony Blair and his government are facing.

But it has to be said that not all British people concern themselves with foreign wars and global politics. So what else do they talk about? At the time of going to press, what hot topics are being discussed at dinner parties, on the bus or in the pub?

There's sport of course. The national passion is football, or 'soccer' as it's sometimes known (but never in Britain), with cricket and rugby not far behind, and there's more interest than usual in other events thanks to London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games. As well as world-class competition, the Games will ensure the arrival of large numbers of overseas visitors (and the money they spend), a raised profile for British tourism, new stadiums and housing, plus increased fitness and improved health for the entire nation. Or so say supporters. Detractors claim that the billions of pounds spent are unlikely to be recouped, local groups protest that a nature reserve, garden allotments and even popular sports venues will be bulldozed to make way for the Olympic Park, and infamously dour commentator Will Self wrote about 'the ludicrous notion that many hours of vegetating on couches watching toned young athletes is going to make any ordinary person more sportive'.

Perhaps of more immediate interest to many Brits is the role of the monarch. Not normally a hot topic, but the marriage of Prince Charles to Camilla and the Queen's 80th birthday celebrations in 2006 ignited discussion – albeit in rather confused terms as people fail to separate Britain's constitutional affairs from actual individuals, so attempts to discuss the relevance of hereditary monarchy are met with responses like 'the Queen works very hard' or 'the Royal Family attracts tourists'. The muddled debate may continue for decades, especially as Prince William (the *next* in line after Charles) is a popular figure thanks to his pin-up looks, action-man image and deft handling of the world's media.

Discussions about monarchy have an extra dimension in Scotland and Wales of course, where many people see Elizabeth II as Queen of *England,* especially as these separate nations within Britain enjoy increased devolution – most recently emphasised by the Welsh Assembly opening in March 2006. There's already a Scottish Parliament, and increasing calls south of the border for a separate English parliament too.

BRITAIN FAST FACTS

Population: 58 million

Size: 88,500 sq miles (230,000 sq km)

Inflation: 2.5%

Unemployment: 5%

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II

Per capita GNP: approximately £14,000 (US$26,000)

Per-person average annual spend on alcohol: £1300

Per-person average annual spend on takeaway food: £300

Per-person average annual spend on fruit and veg: £280

Proportion of British people overweight or obese: 60%

Another topic of discussion for many Brits is increasing rates of crime. Although levels of some offences (such as violence resulting in injury) are actually going down, vandalism and nuisance behaviour caused by binge drinking remain serious problems. Responses range from some shopping centres banning teenagers wearing hoodies (hooded jackets – a symbol of surly youthdom) to the government's introduction of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) allowing police to curtail persistent offenders. Thus Tony Blair keeps the first part of his promise to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime', but state funding is in desperately short supply for youth clubs and other activities that might keep kids out of trouble in the first place.

On the up-side, ASBO swiftly entered the English language as an acronym ('I was caught spraying graffiti and had an asbo slapped on me') then became a byword for any control device. This, for example, from a gushing motor journalist: '…a car so powerful it doesn't just need brakes, it needs an asbo'.

Controls of a far more serious nature – security restrictions – are another talking point for many British people. As part of the global 'war against terror' (the first time in history that hostilities have been declared on an abstract noun, as Monty Python comedian and columnist Terry Jones famously noted) Brits are getting used to visible changes like longer searches at airports and armed police on the streets, while in the background controversial laws are introduced – limiting freedom of speech and public protests, holding prisoners without charge for longer periods – a 'bonfire of the liberties' according to the *Independent* newspaper.

Security tightened even more after the bomb attack in London in July 2005, giving England it's own 7/7 after America's 9/11, an event all the more shattering when it transpired that the attackers were British. How bad have things got, asked the newspaper commentators, how big a rift has been created, when world events inspire disaffected young men to randomly attack hundreds of their fellow citizens?

So with the political scene at home and abroad not looking so rosy, a general air of disillusion prevails, and is perhaps why the voter turnout in 2006's council elections was around 40%, with some areas only 25%. In reality, voter numbers have been dropping since the 1960s, but right now it seems the British are particularly tired of politicians whatever their hue. It's a telling indictment that more people vote in TV talent shows than for their country's leaders.

That in turn is a symptom of Britain's ever-growing obsession with fame and celebrity. Popular newspapers carry endless articles about stars of fashion, pop, TV and sport, while celebrity magazines *Hello!* and *Heat* sell half-a-million copies every week. And it seems the Brits love to see pictures of these happy smiling people on the beach, leaving the gym, or – ideally – snorting cocaine, even though their 'celebrity' status is based on little more than the ability to sing a jolly tune, look good in tight trousers or kick a ball in the right direction.

And that brings us to back to football. There is no British national side – political devolution may be new, but there's always been separate football teams – but England reached the final stages of the World Cup in 2006, then put in a lacklustre performance, while Scotland and Wales didn't even qualify. Nimbly overlooking politics and world events, irrepressible British sports fans are already looking forward to 2010's championship. Let's hope the national teams do a bit better next time…

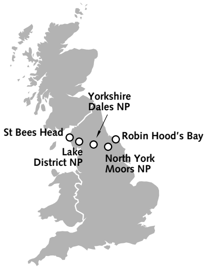
The Authors

DAVID ELSE **Coordinating Author**

As a full-time professional travel writer, David has authored more than 20 guidebooks, including Lonely Planet's *England* and *Walking in Britain*. His knowledge of Britain comes from a lifetime of travel around the country – often on foot or by bike – a passion dating from university years, when heading for the hills was always more attractive than visiting the library. Originally from London, David slowly trekked northwards via Wiltshire, Bristol and Derbyshire (with periods of exile in Wales and Africa) to his present base in Yorkshire. For those interested in domestic matters: David is married with a baby daughter, who already finds herself tramping over mountains – in a backpack carried by her dad – whenever the sun shines.

My Favourite Trip

While researching this book, I revisited some of my favourite places in Great Britain: the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors, three wonderful national parks. I combined them into a coast-to-coast jaunt, and just for fun covered the entire distance (with a group of friends) by mountain bike, avoiding roads wherever possible. The route took us from St Bees Head, along the tranquil valley of Ennerdale, through Wordsworth's birthplace Grasmere, across the Pennine Hills via the lovely valley of Swaledale, round the edge of the Cleveland Hills escarpment and along sylvan Eskdale, to finish at Robin Hood's Bay. Great countryside, tough challenge, good company – all the ingredients for a favourite trip. We'll do it again next year.



JOLYON ATTWOOLL **The Midlands**

Jolyon's earliest childhood memory is of travelling in England as a toddler perched on the top floor of a Manchester double-decker bus. Although his primary-school years in Melbourne, Australia, stifled a nascent northern accent, Jolyon's connection to the green and pleasant land had only just begun. Aged 11, he returned with his family to settle in the West Midlands metropolis of Coventry where he has remained on and off for more than two decades. Following stints as a bookseller, and web and magazine editor, Jolyon now works as a full-time travel writer. When away from the Midlands, he is most likely to be somewhere in Latin America.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.

CHARLOTTE BEECH **Southeast England, The Marches, Eastern England**

By happy coincidence, Charlotte found herself covering both the Marches region of her birth and her old university haunts in eastern England for this guide. And she was pleased to discover, even with rose-tinted specs dutifully laid aside, they were still home to some of the loveliest gems in the country. Now a part-time Londoner and full-time travel writer, Charlotte has penned guidebooks from South America to Asia, but in taking on this book discovered that she relished writing in her own back yard as much as anywhere.

OLIVER BERRY **Southwest England, Cumbria & the Lakes**

Oliver graduated from University College London with a degree in English and now works as a freelance writer and photographer. He's been proud to call the land of Kernow home for most of the last 28 years, and is always looking for excuses to wander around the county's beaches and clifftops; writing a guidebook is the best one yet. For this book he also braved the perils of the traditional British beach holiday, ate cheddar in Cheddar, had a bath in Bath, went in search of Wordsworth & Co and met an unmistakably English assortment of white witches, latter-day druids, morris dancers, bell-ringers and zorbing instructors along the way. Oliver has received several awards for his writing including the *Guardian* Young Travel Writer of the Year.

LAETITIA CLAPTON **London, Southeast England**

Laetitia was born in London and, having grown up in Canada, Cambridgeshire and Shropshire, has spent the last 10 years happily living in the capital. When she's not exploring the city's shops, galleries, markets and hidden corners, she escapes the smoke of the Big Smoke with weekend breaks in the lush and underrated Home Counties, or further afield. She has always been passionate about travel, studying French and German at Cambridge University, spending a year in Normandy teaching English to adolescents and generally trotting the globe at every available opportunity. These days she makes a living as a freelance writer and publishing consultant.

FIONN DAVENPORT **Yorkshire, Northwest England, Northeast England**

Dublin-born and bred, Fionn has been traipsing about his favourite bits of England (north of the Watford Gap) for nearly a decade, getting lost in Newcastle suburbs, snowed under in northern Lancashire and mobbed by pensioners in York. All the while he's learnt to love a country so near to his own yet so utterly unknown to most who assume that England is just one giant suburb dotted with roundabouts. His favourite place is the Northumberland coast, followed closely by the Trent House Soul Bar in Newcastle and his beloved Anfield in Liverpool.

BELINDA DIXON **Channel Islands**

Carted, uncomplainingly, off to the Channel Islands each year on family holidays, Belinda has been visiting ever since, which now constitutes more years than she dares count. Those visits, and some stints working on the islands in her other role as a terribly serious news journalist, made this a dream job. Research by boat and bicycle was a first and she's decided all work in future will have to accommodate swims between fact-checking, sunset strolls and memorable, moonlit bike rides.

GEORGE DUNFORD **Edinburgh, Southern Scotland, Highlands & Northern Islands**

Working as a cook on a remote island in Scotland during the mid-1990s gave George a thirst for the Highlands and islands that he was keen to slake with this trip. This time around he was attacked by bonxies, enjoyed the ceilidh of Skye Music Festival and never drank enough Irn Bru to chase away that hangover. When not living life to the kilt, George is a Melbourne-based writer who has co-authored various Lonely Planet guidebooks.

ETAIN O'CARROLL **Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds & Gloucestershire**

Coming from small-town Ireland, Etain found everything on childhood trips to England exotic: the motorway service stations serving gammon and pineapple; the sparkly pens in swanky Woolworths; the brightly lit supermarkets with endless aisles; and the cousins with funny accents. She barely registered the castles, abbeys and stately homes she saw in between. Now living in Oxford, the childish awe has become a long-term appreciation of the fine architecture, bucolic countryside and rich heritage of her adopted home. As a travel writer and photographer, Etain still gets her kicks from observing the subtle, everyday differences in life around the world, but cherished the opportunity to wax lyrical about her favourite spots in her own back yard.

ANDY SYMINGTON **Central Scotland**

Andy is from Sydney but descended from proud Scottish stock, which mainly manifests itself in a love of malt, a debatable ginger colour to his facial hair and occasional appearances in a kilt. From childhood slogs up the M1 he graduated to making dubious road-trips around the firths in a disintegrating Mini Metro and thence to peddling whisky in darkest Leith. Whilst living there, he travelled widely around the country in search of the perfect dram, and, now resident in Spain, continues to visit as often as humanly possible. Andy is the author of several guidebooks and contributed to the previous edition of *Great Britain,* among other Lonely Planet titles.

NIGEL WALLIS **Cardiff, South Wales, Mid Wales, North Wales**

Hailing from England's industrial north, Nigel's first encounter with Wales was on a long-forgotten camping trip with the Scouts. Since then he's made frequent trips to this ancient land, most often to scramble the rocky peaks of Snowdonia but lately also in exploration of the Pembrokeshire coast. Between these two extremes he can be found, every August, loitering in the Brecon Beacons at his favourite music festival. Nigel graduated from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne with a degree in English, after which he returned to his hometown of Leeds where various trades keep him solvent. This project is a milestone for Nigel – his first for Lonely Planet.

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Glasgow & Southern Scotland

No-one ever does a lowland fling, but as you dance across this region with its historic sites, epic walking and cycling, and renaissance city Glasgow, you'll wonder why not. While tour buses chug to the must-sees of the Highlands, there's a gentler, less crowded beauty along the border.

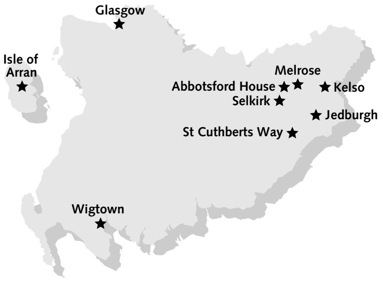
Early tourists were raiding English armies who wanted to souvenir the whole country, causing borderland forts to spring up like thistles. Waves of invasion washed back and forth over the Borders with large prosperous abbeys holding rock-like despite the violence around them. Most were regularly ransacked before the Reformation completed the trashing, leaving ruins that are linked today by popular cycling and walking paths.

To the hilly west is the rugged terrain that inspired Robert Burns, Scotland's best-loved poet, whose earthy yarns proved popular as stories to tell in pubs. You might even find yourself recalling *Tam o' Shanter* as you drink in market-town pubs here.

Snaking from the west, the River Clyde was once the lifeblood of Glasgow. The basis of the city's now-defunct shipbuilding industry, the Clyde continued its course to bring prosperity to the market town of New Lanark. But Scotland's biggest city is alive and kicking with a significant cultural contribution to make, particularly with a live-music scene that's bound to have you on your feet and dancing (though, hopefully, not flinging).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pioneering Glasgow's new **Kelvingrove Museum** (p790) – playful art and clever history
- Making the pilgrimage along **St Cuthbert's Way** (p801), taking in towns like **Kelso** (p805), **Jedburgh** (p806) and **Melrose** (p803)
- Tracking down that hard-to-find secondhand classic from *Beano* to Bond in the book nooks of **Wigtown** (p811)
- Getting up close and personal with a great Scott: Sir Walter at his home **Abbotsford House** (p804), or his **court** (p802) in Selkirk
- Breaking into the live-music scene at a **T Break gig** (p796) or at one of Glasgow's thumping **live-music venues** (p796)
- Packing a picnic on the **Isle of Arran** (p819), which includes a wee dram from the island's own **distillery** (p817)



- POPULATION: 2,701,580
- AREA: 7464 SQ MILES

History

Traditionally a dubious borderland between the Scots and their chief tormentors, southern Scotland was lawless for centuries, as local chiefs sought power by engaging in skulduggery with one side or the other. The Border abbeys set up in the 12th century succeeded in maintaining order for a period, but were soon reduced to ruins by rampaging English raiding parties, a pattern that continued right up until the union in 1707.

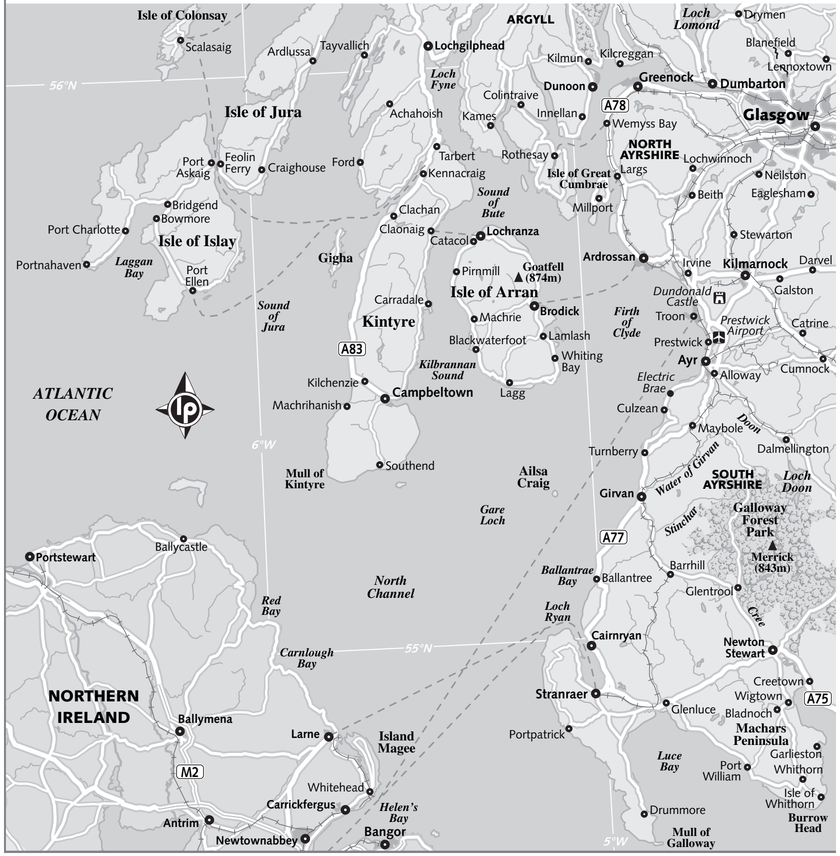
Activities

Despite the active reputation of Scotland's northwest, Southern Scotland has plenty of walking and cycling routes. We give suggestions for shorter routes throughout this chapter. If you're looking for something longer, several long-distance walking and cycling routes originate in Glasgow; many form part of the constantly expanding **National Cycle Network** and follow traffic-free routes for most of the way.

Glasgow's tourist office (p785) has a range of maps and leaflets detailing these routes, many of which start from Bell's Bridge by the Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre (SECC), beside the river.

The **Glasgow to Loch Lomond Route** traverses residential and industrial areas following disused train lines and towpaths. The route actually extends all the way to Inverness, from Balloch via Aberfoyle to link with the Glen Ogle Trail, Killin, Pitlochry and Aviemore.

SOUTHERN SCOTLAND


Isle of Colonsay
Scalasaig
ARGYLL
Loch Lomond
Drymen
Ardlussa
Tayvallich
Lochgilphead
Blanefield
Loch Fyne
Kilmun
Kilcreggan
Lennoxtown
56°N
Greenock
Dumbarton
Dunoon
Isle of Jura
Colintraive
Achahoish
Kames
Innellan
A78
Wemyss Bay
Glasgow
Tarbert
Rothesay
NORTH AYRSHIRE
Lochwinnoch
Port Askaig
Feolin Ferry
Craighouse
Ford
Kennacraig
Isle of Great Cumbrae
Largs
Neilston
Sound of Bute
Beith
Eaglesham
Bridgend
Bowmore
Clachan
Millport
Port Charlotte
Claonaig
Lochranza
Stewarton
Isle of Islay
Catacol
Portnahaven
Laggan Bay
Port Ellen
Gigha
Pirnmill
Goatfell (874m)
Ardrossan
Irvine
Kilmarnock
Darvel
Sound of Jura
Carradale
Isle of Arran
Dundonald Castle
Galston
Kintyre
Machrie
Brodick
Firth of Clyde
Troon
Prestwick Airport
Catrine
A83
Blackwaterfoot
Lamlash
Prestwick
Whiting Bay
Ayr
Cumnock
Kilchenzie
Kilbrannan Sound
Alloway
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Machrihanish
Campbeltown
Lagg
Electric Brae
Culzean
Doon
Maybole
6°W
Dalmellington
Turnberry
Southend
Ailsa Craig
Water of Girvan
SOUTH AYRSHIRE
Loch Doon
Mull of Kintyre
Girvan
Gare Loch
Galloway Forest Park
Stinchar
A77
Ballycastle
Merrick (843m)
Portstewart
Barrhill
North Channel
Ballantrae Bay
Ballantree
Glentrool
Red Bay
Loch Ryan
Cree
Cairnryan
Newton Stewart
Carnlough Bay
55°N
Creetown
NORTHERN IRELAND
Stranraer
Wigtown
A75
Glenluce
Bladnoch
Ballymena
Island Magee
Machars Peninsula
Larne
Portpatrick
Garlieston
Luce Bay
Port William
Whithorn
M2
Whitehead
Isle of Whithorn
Carrickfergus
Helen's Bay
Drummore
Burrow Head
Antrim
Bangor
5°W
Mull of Galloway
Newtownabbey

The **Glasgow to Irvine/Ardrossan and West Kilbride Cycle Way** runs via Paisley, then traffic-free as far as Glengarnock. From there to Kilwinning it follows minor roads, then the route is partly traffic-free to Ardrossan, from where ferries leave for the Isle of Arran.

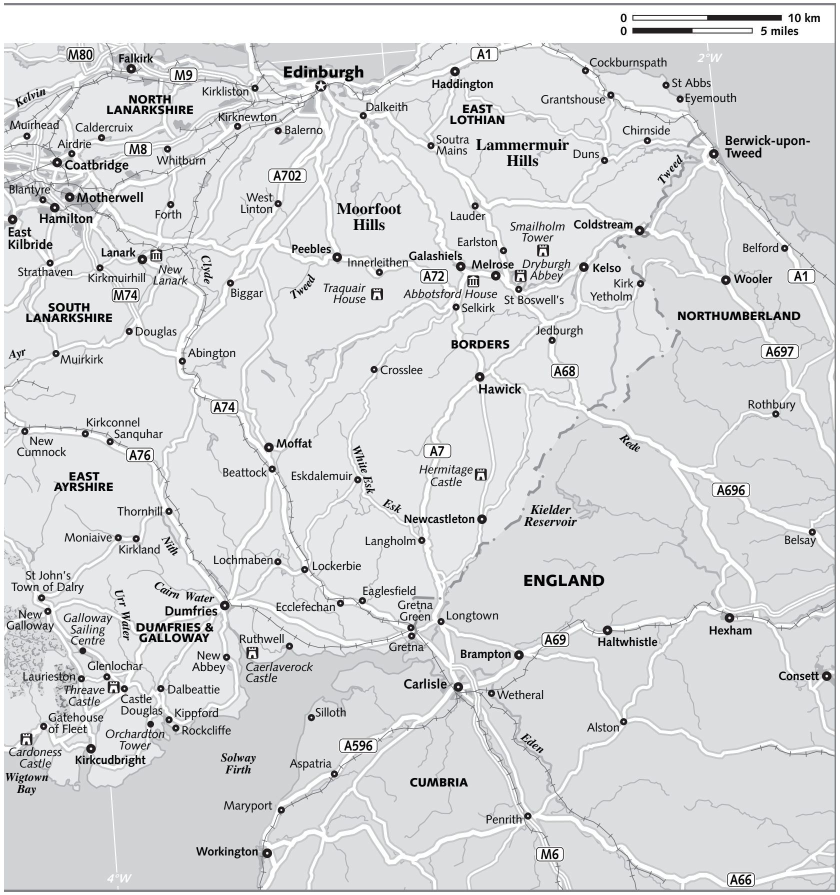
The **Glasgow to Edinburgh** route partly follows the Clyde Walkway and a disused railway line.

The long-distance footpath, the **West Highland Way**, begins in Milngavie, 8 miles north of Glasgow, and runs for 95 miles to Fort William.

One of Scotland's great long-distance walks is the challenging, 212-mile **Southern Upland Way**, which stretches from coast to coast across southern Scotland. There are several tough stretches with sturdy hills to be climbed, but the sheer variety of the landscape traversed makes it memorable. For more information, check out www.southernuplandway.com.

Getting Around

Glasgow is an obvious transport hub, and bus services are good throughout the region. Train services are more limited. Other stations of interest include Berwick-upon-Tweed (in Northumberland on the English side of the border, but the natural jumping-off point for the Tweed Valley) on the main east-coast line; Dumfries on the main west-coast line; and Stranraer and Ayr, which are linked to Glasgow.


0 10 km
0 5 miles
M80
Falkirk
A1
Cockburnspath
2°W
M9
Edinburgh
Haddington
St Abbs
Kelvin
NORTH LANARKSHIRE
Kirkliston
Eyemouth
Grantshouse
Dalkeith
EAST LOTHIAN
Muirhead
Caldercruix
Kirknewton
Balerno
Chirnside
Airdrie
M8
Soutra Mains
Lammermuir Hills
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Coatbridge
Whitburn
Duns
Tweed
A702
Blantyre
Motherwell
West Linton
Moorfoot Hills
Lauder
Forth
Smailholm Tower
Coldstream
Hamilton
East Kilbride
Earlston
Belford
Peebles
Galashiels
Lanark
Innerleithen
Melrose
Dryburgh Abbey
Kelso
Strathaven
New Lanark
Clyde
Kirkmuirhill
A72
Wooler
A1
Traquair House
Biggar
Tweed
Abbotsford House
Kirk Yetholm
St Boswell's
M74
Selkirk
NORTHUMBERLAND
SOUTH LANARKSHIRE
Douglas
BORDERS
Jedburgh
A697
Ayr
Abington
Muirkirk
Crosslee
A68
Hawick
A74
Kirkconnel
Rothbury
New Cumnock
Sanquhar
Moffat
Rede
A76
A7
White Esk
EAST AYRSHIRE
Beattock
Eskdalemuir
Hermitage Castle
A696
Esk
Thornhill
Newcastleton
Kielder Reservoir
Moniaive
Nith
Belsay
Kirkland
Langholm
Lochmaben
Lockerbie
St John's Town of Dalry
Cairn Water
Eaglesfield
ENGLAND
Urr Water
New Galloway
Dumfries
Ecclefechan
Gretna Green
Longtown
Galloway Sailing Centre
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY
Hexham
Ruthwell
A69
Haltwhistle
Glenlochar
New Abbey
Gretna
Brampton
Caerlaverock Castle
Laurieston
Consett
Threave Castle
Dalbeattie
Carlisle
Castle Douglas
Wetheral
Gatehouse of Fleet
Kippford
Silloth
Rockcliffe
Alston
Orchardton Tower
Eden
Cardoness Castle
Kirkcudbright
A596
Solway Firth
Aspatria
Wigtown Bay
CUMBRIA
Maryport
Penrith
Workington
4°W
M6
A66

GLASGOW

☎ 0141 / pop 629,500

With a CV that includes City of Architecture (1999) and City of Culture (1990), you'd think Glasgow would be a shoe-in for the 2014 Commonwealth Games (the host city will be determined in late 2007). But this is also the city whose inhabitants have the highest cholesterol in the EU, and in which there's still a simmering sectarianism between Roman Catholic and Protestant residents. Consider that Glasgow produced both the comedian Billy Connolly and tea-mogul Sir Thomas Lipton, and you'll soon learn what a complex and contrary place it can be.

Part of the problem is Edinburgh. While Glasgow is Scotland's largest city it was pipped for capital by the more sophisticated city to the east. And a (mostly) friendly rivalry has existed ever since. Folk from Edinburgh tease Glaswegians (or Weegies) for their thick working-class accents; you may be saying 'Huh?' more than you expected in an English-speaking city.

But Glasgow is no longer the rough little brother to Edinburgh's urbane older sister. The city is picking itself up and developing along the once-grim River Clyde faster than you can say 'urban renewal'. It's a city famous for its architecture (from Mackintosh curls to Gothic cathedrals), with music a big cultural contribution (and everyone claiming to have seen 'Franz' here before they made it big). The city that was once 'Workshop to the World' is finding a new vocation.

HISTORY

Glasgow grew around the cathedral founded by Kertigan, later to become St Mungo, in the 6th century. Other than the cathedral, virtually nothing of the medieval city remains, as it was worn away by energetic reformers: from the Reformation to the Industrial Revolution.

But Glasgow has never dwelt on its past. In the 18th century, the tobacco trade between Europe and America came through Glasgow, creating great wealth and an architectural flowering. Even after tobacco crashed in the 19th century, the city continued to prosper with healthy textile manufacturing, shipbuilding and the coal and steel industries. This prosperity, however, came at great cost to workers, who endured appalling conditions.

In the first half of the 20th century, Glasgow was the centre of Britain's munitions industry, supplying arms and ships for both world wars, in the second of which the city was carpet-bombed. In the postwar years, however, the port and heavy industries dwindled, and by the early 1970s the city seemed doomed.

Unlike Edinburgh, working-class Glasgow had few alternatives when recession hit and the city became synonymous with unemployment, economic depression and urban violence, centred on high-rise housing schemes such as the infamous Gorbals. The urban development programmes of recent times have renewed confidence, but behind the optimism the standard of living remains low compared with the rest of Britain and life continues to be tough for many. Recent bright signs include the redevelopment along the Clyde and the celebration of Glasgow as a centre for culture.

ORIENTATION

Glasgow's tourist sights are spread over a wide area. The city centre is built on a grid system north of the River Clyde. The two train stations and bus station are within a couple of blocks of George Sq, the main city square. Running east–west along a ridge in the northern part of the city, Sauchiehall St (first syllable pronounced soch as in loch) has a pedestrian mall with numerous shops at its eastern end. Merchant City is the commercial district, east of George Sq, and a focus for fashionable eating and drinking. The West End, divided from the centre by the M8 motorway, is a similarly buzzy nightlife zone, with a more student-driven feel. Motorways bore through the bleak suburbs and the main airport lies 8 miles west of the centre.

Maps

The *A-Z Premier Street Map* (£4.75) is a clear fold-out map of Glasgow and its suburbs, which includes a street index. It's widely available in bookshops and newsagents.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Borders (☎ 222 7700; 98 Buchanan St) Wide range of Scottish literature, good travel section, and a café.

Voltaire & Rousseau (☎ 339 1811; 18 Otago Lane) A real studenty secondhand store.

Emergency

Dial ☎ 999 or ☎ 112 for police, ambulance, fire brigade or coastguard.

Internet Access

easyInternetcafé (☎ 222 2364; 57 St Vincent St; per hr about £1.50; 🕒 7am-10.45pm) Under-18s need an adult companion to enter.

Hillhead Library (☎ 339 7223; 348 Byres Rd; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Tue, 10am-5pm Wed, noon-8pm Thu, 9am-5pm Fri & Sat) Free internet access, but book ahead.

Internet Resources

Glasgow Galleries (www.glasgowgalleries.co.uk)

Glasgow Museums (www.glasgowmuseums.com)

Greater Glasgow & Clyde Valley Tourist Board (www.seeglasgow.com)

Laundry

Havelock Laundry (☎ 339 1499; 10 Havelock Rd) Just off Byres Rd.

Medical Services

Glasgow Royal Infirmary (☎ 211 4000; 84 Castle St) Medical emergencies and outpatient facilities.

Money

The post office offers the most competitive rates on currency exchange. There's a bureau de change at the tourist office and at both airports. There are many banks with ATMs around the centre and at the airports.

American Express (☎ 222 1401; cnr Hope & Bothwell Sts; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Post

Main post office (47 St Vincent St; 🕒 8.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat)

Tourist Information

St Enoch Square Travel Centre (☎ 226 4826; St Enoch Sq; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Provides information on all transport in the Glasgow region.

Tickets Scotland (☎ 204 5151; 239 Argyle St; 🕒 9am-6pm) Sells tickets for most tours and gigs around town.

Tourist office (www.seeglasgow.com) Central (☎ 204 4400; 11 George Sq; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat Jun & Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Sun year-round); Glasgow Airport (☎ 848 4440; 🕒 7.30am-5pm)

SIGHTS

City Centre

A walking tour (p791) covers the main sights. Two buildings designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh – the Glasgow School of Art and the Scotland School Church – are also in the area (see p789).

GEORGE SQUARE

This grand open space is dignified by statues of famous Glaswegians and folk from Scotland's south, including Robert Burns, James Watt, Sir John Moore, and, atop a column, Sir Walter Scott. A regal pair of lions guard the war memorial that epitomises the Victorian-era environs.

The seat of local government, the **City Chambers** (☎ 287 4018; George Sq; admission & tours free) was built in the 1880s at the high point of the city's prosperity. The interior is even more extravagant than the exterior, and the chambers have been used as a movie location, standing in for the Kremlin and the Vatican. The 45-minute tours (10.30am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday) are worthwhile for the sheer opulence on show.

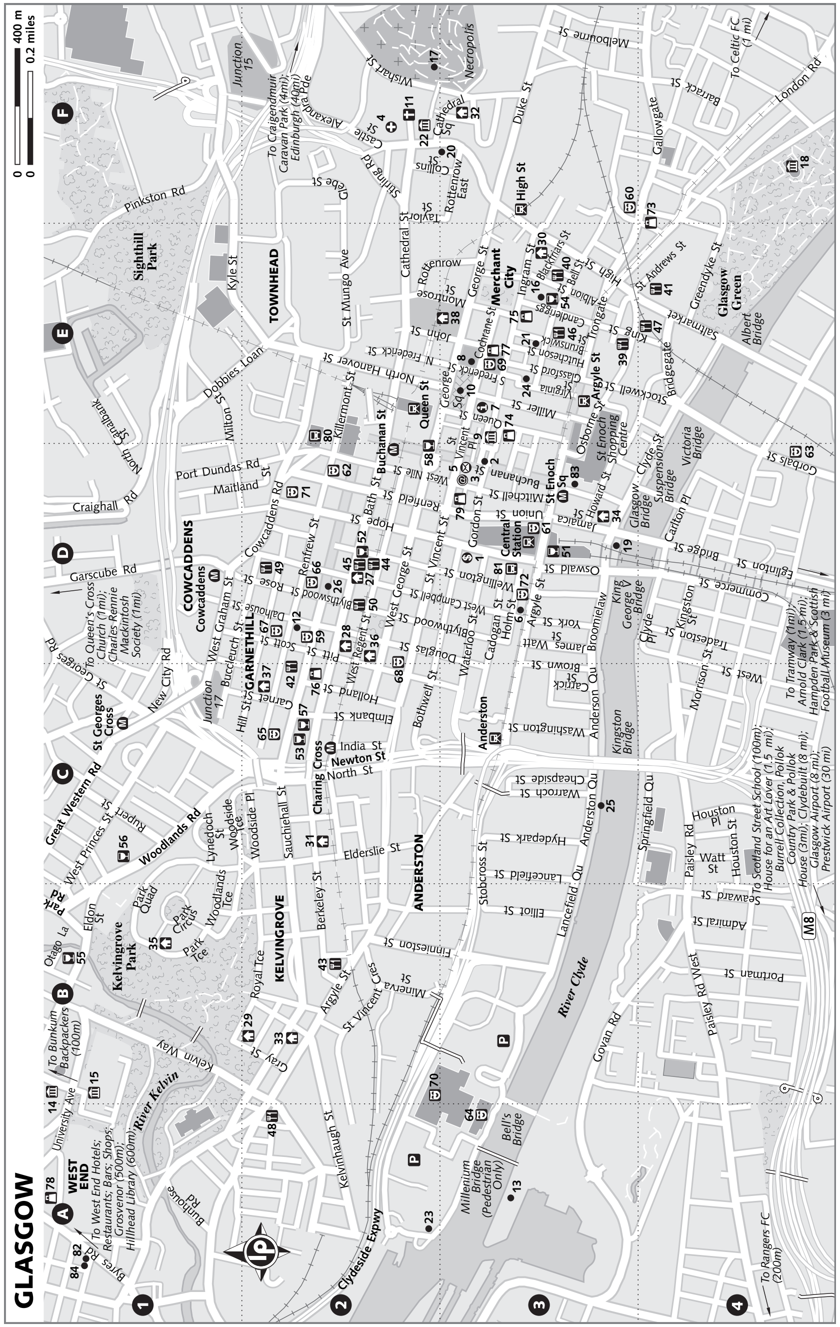
MERCHANT CITY

The prosperity of Glasgow's boom years are evident in Merchant City, a planned 18th-century civic expansion. The city's 'tobacco lords' profited from lucrative transatlantic trade routes, importing tobacco, rum and sugar. The noble civic and private buildings they erected have recently been renewed as stylish apartments, and as some of Glasgow's best bars and restaurants.

The pompous exterior of the 1775 former mansion that has become the **Gallery of Modern Art** (GoMA; ☎ 229 1996; www.glasgowmuseums.com; Queen St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 10am-8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun; ♿) contrasts with the contemporary paintings and sculpture inside. It's a popular gallery particularly geared for kids, with plenty of activities. Outside, local smart-artists do a daily 'installation' of a traffic cone on the horseback statue of the Duke of Wellington, despite the local council's regular removal of their handiwork.

GLASGOW CATHEDRAL

Majestic **Glasgow Cathedral** (HS; ☎ 552 6891; www.glasgowcathedral.org.uk; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) is an exemplar of Gothic architecture and Scotland's only mainland cathedral to survive the Reformation. This cathedral was built in 1136, but prior to its construction no less than three houses of worship were built and rebuilt on this sloping hill. The present structure dates principally from the 15th century when the city's trade guilds fought to save the structure, which then


GLASGOW
0 400 m
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A
B
C
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F
1
2
3
4
WEST END
KELVINGROVE
ANDERSTON
GARNETHILL
COWCADDENS
TOWNHEAD
Merchant City
Kelvingrove Park
Sighthill Park
Glasgow Green
River Clyde
River Kelvin
Great Western Rd
Woodlands Rd
Sauchiehall St
Argyle St
Clydeside Expwy
Buchanan St
Queen St
High St
Duke St
George St
St Vincent St
West George St
Bath St
Kingston Bridge
George V Bridge
Glasgow Bridge
Victoria Bridge
Albert Bridge
Bell's Bridge
Millenium Bridge (Pedestrian Only)
Charing Cross
St Georges Cross
Central Station
St Enoch Shopping Centre
Junction 15
Junction 17
M8
To Craigendmuir Caravan Park (4mi); Edinburgh (47mi)
To Celtic FC (1 mi)
To Bunkum Backpackers (100m)
To West End Hotels; Restaurants; Bars; Shops; Grosvenor (500m); Hillhead Library (600m)
To Queen's Cross Church (1mi); Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society (1mi)
To Tramway (1mi); Arnold Clark (1.5 mi); Hampden Park & Scottish Football Museum (3 mi)
To Scotland Street School (100m); House for an Art Lover (1.5 mi); Burrell Collection; Pollok Country Park & Pollok House (3mi); Clydebuilt (8 mi); Glasgow Airport (8 mi); Prestwick Airport (30 mi)
To Rangers FC (200m)

INFORMATION

American Express	1	D3
Borders	2	D3
easyInternet Café	3	D3
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	4	F2
Main Post Office	5	D3
St Enoch Square Travel Centre	(see 83)	
Tickets Scotland	6	D3
Tourist Office	7	E3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

City Chambers	8	E3
Gallery of Modern Art	9	E3
George Square	10	E3
Glasgow Cathedral	11	F2
Glasgow School of Art	12	D2
Glasgow Science Centre	13	A3
Hunterian Art Gallery	14	B1
Hunterian Museum	15	B1
Merchant Square	16	E3
Necropolis	17	F2
People's Palace & Winter Gardens	18	F4
Pride o' the Clyde	19	D3
Provand's Lordship	20	F3
Sheriff Court	21	E3
St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art	22	F2
Tall Ship & Pumphouse	23	A2
Trades Hall	24	E3
Waverley	25	C3
Willow Tea Rooms	26	D2

SLEEPING

ABode	27	D2
Adelaide's	28	D2
Alamo Guest House	29	B2
Babbity Bowster	30	E3
Blue Sky Backpackers	31	C2
Cathedral House Hotel	32	F3
Devoncove	33	B2
Euro Hostel	34	D3
Glasgow SYHA Hostel	35	B1
Malmaison	36	D2
Rennie Mackintosh Hotel	37	C2
University of Strathclyde Campus Village	38	E3

EATING

13th Note	39	E3
Café Gandolfi	40	E3
Café Lava	41	E4
Centre for Contemporary Arts	42	C2
Fanny Trollope's	43	B2
Fratelli Sarti	44	D2
Fratelli Sarti	45	D2
Mao	46	E3
Mono	47	E4
The Goat	48	A2
Wee Curry Shop	49	D2
Where the Monkey Sleeps	50	D2

DRINKING

Arches	51	D3
Babbity Bowster	(see 30)	
Bloc	52	D2
Centre for Contemporary Arts	(see 42)	
Nice 'n' Sleazy	53	C2
Red Lizard	54	E3
Tchai Ovna	55	B1
Uisge Beatha	56	C1
Variety	57	C2
Waxy O'Connors	58	D2

ENTERTAINMENT

13th Note	(see 39)	
ABC	59	D2
Arches	(see 51)	
Barrowland	60	F3
Bloc	(see 52)	
Cathouse	61	D3
Cineworld	62	D2
Citizens' Theatre	63	D4
Clyde Auditorium (Armadillo)	64	A3
Garage	65	C2
Glasgow Film Theatre	66	D2
Glasgow School of Art	67	D2
King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	68	C2
Nice 'n' Sleazy	(see 53)	
Revolver	69	E3
Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre (SECC)	70	B2
Theatre Royal	71	D2
Waterloo Bar	72	D3

SHOPPING

Barras	73	F4
Designer Exchange	74	E3
Dr Jives	75	E3
Geoffrey (Tailor) Kiltmaker	76	C2
Italian Centre	77	E3
Monorail	(see 47)	
OneWorld	78	A1
Robert Graham & Co	79	D3
Versace	(see 77)	
Voltaire & Rousseau	(see 55)	

TRANSPORT

Buchanan Bus Station	80	E2
Buses to Hunterian Museum	81	D3
Clarkson	82	A1
Pride o' the Clyde	(see 19)	
St Enoch Square Travel Centre	83	D3
West End Cycles	84	A1

became the principal Protestant church. This site has been hallowed ground for over 1700 years, since St Ninian blessed the area for Christian burial, though it wasn't until the 6th century that St Mungo built a church here.

The **lower church** is the most interesting part; its forest of pillars creates a powerful atmosphere around the altar that sits on St Mungo's tomb, the focus of a famous medieval pilgrimage.

Behind the cathedral, the crumbling tombs of the city's rich and famous crowd the renovated **Necropolis**, which is worth a stroll for impressive city views.

It's a 20-minute walk to the cathedral from George Sq, but numerous buses pass by, including buses 11, 12, 36, 37, 38 and 42.

ST MUNGO MUSEUM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE & ART

Amid the city's bellicose sectarianism, this **museum** (☎ 553 2557; www.glasgowmuseums.com; 2 Castle St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun; ♿) in the cathedral forecourt gathers the world's many faiths in one building. Art is the great unifier, with paintings and sculpture depicting the similarities and differences of universal themes such as birth, marriage and death.

From a Day of the Dead dancing skeleton to impressively decorated copies of the Koran, the exhibition is never slowed by love-thy-neighbour sentimentality. The top floor is dedicated to Scotland's religion. Outside, you'll find Britain's first Zen garden with an aspect that contemplates the Necropolis.

PROVAND'S LORDSHIP

Across the road from St Mungo Museum, **Provand's Lordship** (☎ 552 8819; www.glasgowmuseums.com; 3 Castle St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun) is Glasgow's oldest house. This rare example of 15th-century domestic Scottish architecture in the city was built as a manse for the chaplain of St Nicholas Hospital. It's particularly interesting to explore:

the ceilings and doorways are low and the rooms are decked out with staunch oak furniture and period artefacts; one room is a reconstruction of the living space of an early 16th-century chaplain. The building's best feature is its authentic feel – if you ignore the tacky, imitation-stone linoleum covering the ground floor.

The Clyde

Strolling along the Clyde gives two very different insights into the city: one of fading glory and another of new prosperity in the redevelopment that some locals call the 'silver city'.

GLASGOW SCIENCE CENTRE

Scotland's flagship millennium project, **Glasgow Science Centre** (☎ 420 5000; www.glasgowsciencecentre.org; 50 Pacific Quay; adult/child Science Mall £6.95/4.95 plus £2 for Planetarium, IMAX £6.95/4.95, combined ticket £9.95/7.95; 🕒 10am-6pm; ♿) could be a *Dr Who* spacecraft with its silver armadillo aesthetic. The two gleaming buildings are packed with kid-friendly activities and even adults will find some fun. The centre consists of an IMAX theatre, a massive interactive science mall and a planetarium that explains the night sky. Take Arriva bus 24 from Renfield St or First Glasgow bus 89 or 90 from Union St.

TALL SHIP & PUMPHOUSE

Across the Clyde from the Science Centre, via pedestrianised **Millennium Bridge**, is the **Tall Ship** (☎ 222 2513; www.thetallship.com; Stobcross Rd; adult/child £4.95/2.50, one child per adult free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb), one of five Clyde-built sailing ships still afloat due to extensive restoration. Launched in 1896, the *Glenlee* is a daunting three-masted vessel that currently holds displays on its restoration and on life aboard.

Nearby, the old **Pumphouse** houses exhibits on the manmade history of the river, which involved the amazing dredging work carried out to enable the big ships to sail into Glasgow. Evidence of the old shipyards still prevail here, in the foundations of a swing bridge, trolley tracks and old warehouses.

CLYDEBUILT

Further away from the centre, **Clydebuilt** (☎ 886 1013; Kings Inch Rd; adult/child £4.25/2.50; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; ♿) is a superb collection of model ships, industrial displays and narrative depicting the river's history. There's a three-screen audiovisual display on shipbuilding and the decline of the Clyde's shipyards, which once clanged and buzzed with industry. Outside you can board *Kyles*, a typical 1872 vessel that's been left here forlorn among gull cries. To complete the time-travel experience, you can get here on the *Pride o' the Clyde* (see p799).

PEOPLE'S PALACE & WINTER GARDENS

Not just a local museum for local people, the **People's Palace & Winter Gardens** (☎ 271 2951; Glasgow Green; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun) showcases what it means to be Glaswegian. From the goofy 1970s portrait of Billy Connolly to dance cards from the former dance hall Barrowland, this is definitely popular history. Displays on language, comedy and the grim old housing are all excellent. The emphasis on interactivity makes it kid-friendly, though some exhibits are getting long in the tooth (phones for AV materials make the PlayStation generation yawn). The attached Winter Gardens is a large greenhouse that's strictly for botany buffs.

West End

The West End is Glasgow's alternative hub, where university students and sophisticates mooch in the plethora of restaurants and bars or bargain-hunt in the many shops.

HUNTERIAN MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Housed in two opposing buildings on University Ave, the **Hunterian Museum** (☎ 330 4221; www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk; University Ave; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) was opened in 1807 as Scotland's first public museum. It houses the collection of William Hunter, physician, medical teacher and former student of the university. It's an eclectic collection of artefacts including a medieval coin collection, dinosaur eggs, and some of Captain Cook's curios from his voyages to the Pacific.

A nearby modern concrete building houses the **Hunterian Art Gallery** (☎ 330 5431; www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk; 82 Hillhead St; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat; ♿). The Scottish colourists (Peploe, JD Fergusson, Cadell) are well represented, and the gallery also includes McTaggart's Impressionistic Scottish landscapes and a gem by Thomas Millie Dow. Also located here is the unmissable Mackintosh House (see opposite).

Buses 11, 44 and 44A pass this way from the city centre (Hope St); it's also a short walk from Hillhead underground station.

CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH, GLASGOW'S GENIUS

Wherever you go in Glasgow, you'll see the quirky and geometric designs of this famous Scottish architect and designer. Many of the buildings Mackintosh designed in Glasgow are now open to the public, and his lean Art Nouveau typeface is so ubiquitous it's virtually *the* Glasgow font.

Born in 1868, Mackintosh studied at the Glasgow School of Art and, aged 27, won a competition to design the School of Art's new building. His talent was quickly recognised on the Continent (he contributed to several exhibitions in France, Germany and Austria) but, at the time, he did not receive his due in Scotland. His Glaswegian architectural career lasted until 1914, when he moved to England to concentrate on furniture design. He died in 1928, but it was only in the last decades of the 20th century that Mackintosh's genius began to be widely recognised and he became Glasgow's favourite architectural son.

Fortunately, Mackintosh left a legacy of impressive edifices throughout the city. His best-known building is the **Glasgow School of Art** (☎ 353 4526; www.gsa.ac.uk/tour; 167 Renfrew St; tours adult/concession £6.50/4.80; 🕒 tours 10.30am, 11am, 11.30am, 1.30pm, 2pm & 2.30pm Apr-Sep), which still houses the educational institution. The oft-photographed building was named one of the world's 100 greatest artistic achievements of the 20th century by the BBC. The first portion was opened in 1899 and is the earliest Art Nouveau piece in Britain. Built on a sloping hill, this structure is seen as the perfect balance of style and function.

North of the city, **Queen's Cross Church** (☎ 946 6600; 870 Garscube Rd; adult/child £2/free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Feb, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct), lit by dazzling stained glass, is Mackintosh's only church design to be built (1896). The simple design draws on both Gothic and Japanese motifs.

On a more intimate scale, **Mackintosh House** (☎ 330 5431; www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk; 82 Hillhead St; admission £2.50, after 2pm Wed free; 🕒 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat) is part of the Hunterian Art Gallery (opposite). This reconstruction of the architect's demolished Glasgow home shows his innovative style even today. You ascend from the gallery's gloomy ground floor into the cool, white, austere drawing room. There's something otherworldly about the mannered style of the beaten silver panels, signature long-backed chairs and surface decorations echoing Celtic manuscript illuminations.

The **Scotland Street School** (☎ 287 0500; 225 Scotland St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun; ♿), an impressive Mackintosh building dominated by two glass stair towers, is now a museum of education from Victorian times to WWII; it may sound dull but it's actually fascinating.

Although designed in 1901 as a competition entry for a German magazine, **House for an Art Lover** (☎ 353 4770; www.houseforanartlover.co.uk; Bellahouston Park, 10 Drumbreck Rd; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Wed, 10am-1pm Thu-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar, call for weekday admission times), 1.5 miles south of the river, was only completed in 1996. It's part of the Glasgow School of Art and has permanent Mackintosh displays. Its rooms are stunning for their light and elegance. The house was co-designed by Mackintosh's wife Margaret MacDonald and is interesting to see how Mackintosh was able to collaborate so well.

The **Willow Tea Rooms** (☎ 332 0521; www.willowtearooms.co.uk; 217 Sauchiehall St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat; wi-fi) were famously designed by Mackintosh in 1903 for local tea lady, Kate Cranston. Mackintosh took his inspiration from the willow, as *sauchiehall* is the Gaelic word for the tree. It used to cost an extra penny to enjoy the silver furniture and mirrored friezes of the Room de Luxe, but today it can be enjoyed for the price of a cuppa.

A good way to get around all the sites is with a **Charles Rennie Mackintosh Trail pass** (www.spt.co.uk/tickets/mackintosh.html; £12), which gets you entry into most Mackintosh attractions in town, allows you to ride public transport for free and is available from the tourist office, SPT travel centres or online from the **Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society** (www.crmsociety.com).

Outside Glasgow

BURRELL COLLECTION

Three miles south of the city centre, the **Burrell Collection** (☎ 287 2550; Pollok Country Park, Pollokshaws Rd; admission free, parking £1; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun; ♿) was donated to the city by wealthy industrialist Sir William Burrell. The building was a result of a design competition

KELVINGROVE RETURNS

After a long closure for a refurbishment that cost in excess of £25 million, Glasgow's much-loved cultural icon, **Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 287 2699; www.glasgowmuseums.com; Argyle St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 11am-5pm Fri & Sun), reopened to the public in July 2006. It originally opened in 1901 and the museum's fusty Victorian display cases and crowded collection needed a re-think, so works were put into storage or taken to another site during restoration.

You might not recognise the museum after its face-lift, which included stripping 100 years worth of grime from the interior walls to reveal honeyed-yellow hues. There are a few old favourites, including **Roger the Asian Elephant** sitting proudly in the west wing, but there's been an ambitious shake-up. The **Conflict and Consequences** display on the 2nd floor hits the target by showing off a weaponry collection while arming it with a strong message for peace. The **Animal Armoury** juxtaposes arms and nature to show how a suit of armour uses the design of an armadillo. If it sounds obscure, you're not thinking hard enough, because this is interaction for the mind, as much as for the kids.

Littlies will love the new museum. Not just for larger stunts like hanging a **Spitfire** from the roof, but also for thoughtful touches like hanging pictures at their eyelevel. Plus there are costumes to try on, replicas to paint, and they can even watch the everyday affairs of a busy beehive.

The old art collection was a byword for national treasure, but the redesign makes it even stronger. There's the necessary nod with **Mackintosh and the Glasgow Style**, but this leads to **Looking At Design**, which gives artistic contexts as well as showing off 1950s plans for a railplane that would hang from a rail and be powered by propellers. Must-see masterpieces include Dali's sublime *Christ of St John of the Cross* and Rembrandt's *Man in Armour,* as well as the works of the Glasgow Boys.

Before closing, Kelvingrove was the UK's second most-visited museum outside of London, though with inspired curatorship and plans to rotate one in 10 exhibits each year, this revitalised museum could take the premier spot.

in 1971, with a spectacular interior providing a fitting setting for its exhibits and European stained glass. Floor-to-ceiling windows flood the interior with natural light, and trees and landscape outside enhance the exhibits. Many of the doorways between galleries are stunning carved portals purloined from Spanish and Italian churches. This idiosyncratic collection includes everything from Chinese porcelain and medieval furniture to paintings by Boudin and Cézanne and sculpture. It isn't so big as to be overwhelming, and the collector's character creates a curious coherence.

The exquisite tapestry galleries are outstanding, with intricate stories woven into staggering, wall-size pieces dating from the 13th century. The massive *Triumph of the Virgin* exemplifies the complexity of this medium, drawing on crusader tales to re-create the Holy Land.

In warmer months picnicking in the flowering park makes for an excellent day-trip. Once part of the Pollok House estate, the grounds boast photogenic Highland cattle and plenty of greenery to lounge on.

There are guided tours of the gallery (free) at 10.30am and 2pm. Numerous buses pass the gates (including buses 45, 47, 48 and 57 from the city) and there's a twice-hourly bus service between the gallery and the gates (a pleasant 10-minute walk), or you can catch the train to Pollokshaws West.

POLLOK HOUSE

It's possible to visit **Pollok House** (NTS; ☎ 616 6410; www.nts.org.uk; Pollok Country Park, 2060 Pollokshaws Rd; admission £8; 🕒 10am-5pm), a sumptuous Edwardian mansion brimful of period furniture with walls graced with paintings by El Greco and Murillo. The servants' quarters alone give an idea of how the British aristocracy once lived.

ACTIVITIES

There are numerous green spaces within the city. **Pollok Country Park** surrounds the Burrell Collection with many woodland trails. Nearer the centre, the **Kelvin Walkway** follows the River Kelvin through Kelvingrove Park, the Botanic Gardens and on to Dawsholm Park. There is also the walk along the Clyde (p788). Several long-distance walking/cycling routes originate in Glasgow (see p782).

WALKING TOUR

Start your walk on busy pedestrianised Buchanan St, just outside Borders bookshop. Heading east from here along Exchange St, you pass through the ornamental **entrance gateway (1)** to Merchant City.

If you were a 19th-century industrialist, the Royal Exchange directly ahead of you might well have been your destination, but this stately colonnaded neoclassical building is now the **Gallery of Modern Art** (**2**; p785).

The statue of the Duke of Wellington on horseback is facing down Ingram St, which you should follow for a couple of blocks. Continue southwards down Glassford St past **Trades Hall** (**3**).

Turn left onto Wilson St, where the bulky **Sheriff Court** (**4**) fills a whole block. It was built in 1842 as Glasgow's town hall and merchants' house. Continue eastwards to **Merchant Square** (**5**), a covered courtyard that was once the city's fruit market but now bustles with cafés and bars. Across the road is **Blackfriars** (**6**), one of the city's most relaxed pubs; grab a window seat and see what's going on. Refreshment on board, continue along Bell St, a continuation of Wilson St, and emerge onto High St. Take a left and follow the street uphill to **Glasgow Cathedral** (**7**; p785).

Behind the cathedral, wind your way up through the noble tombs of the **Necropolis** (**8**; p787) with rewarding city views, before heading back down and taking in the **St Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art** (**9**; p787) and **Provand's Lordship** (**10**; p787).

Then follow busy Cathedral St back towards the centre, passing the buildings of the University of Strathclyde as you go. A left down North Frederick St and you'll reach **George Square** (**11**; p785) with its statues of famous Glaswegians and the monumental **City Chambers** (**12**; p785).

TOURS

Two open-top bus tours of Glasgow offer commentary and follow a similar city route. Both start on George Sq outside the tourist office and offer a hop-on, hop-off service.

City Sightseeing (☎ 204 0444; www.citysightseeingglasgow.co.uk; adult/child £9/3) Runs similar buses in many world cities.

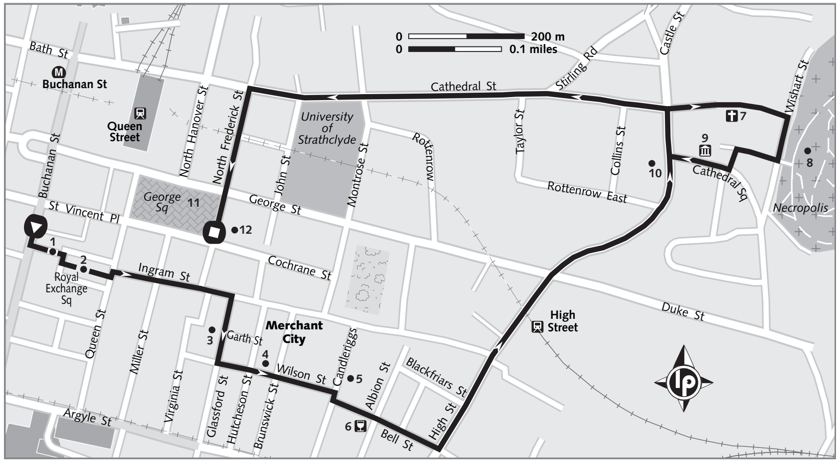
Classic Glasgow Tour (☎ 636 3190) Run by First, the urban bus company.

Scot-Trek (☎ 334 9232; www.scot-trek.co.uk; adult £8-22) Does a range of walks in Glasgow's surrounding area from affordable evening walks to full-day hikes.

Waverley (☎ 0845 130 4647; www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk; Anderston Quay; cruises £6-30; 🕒 Apr-Sep) Board this for a trip on the world's last ocean-going paddle-steamer. It cruises the Firth of Clyde, serving several towns and the islands of Bute, Great Cumbrae and Arran, as well as other coastal areas in the UK.

WALK FACTS

Start Buchanan St
Finish George Sq
Distance 2.5 miles
Duration one to three hours



SLEEPING

Finding decent options in July and August can be difficult – for a B&B, arrive reasonably early and use the tourist office's booking service. Beware of some 'backpacker accommodation' advertised at train/bus stations that often amounts to nothing more than a scam, with backpackers sleeping in filthy shared flats because the nonexistent hostel is being 'renovated'.

City Centre

BUDGET

Euro Hostel (☎ 222 2828; www.euro-hostels.co.uk; 318 Clyde St; dm £14-16, s/tw £35/40; 💻 ♿) You'd be tempted to add 'Eastern' to this bunkhouse's name, as it's a large institutional slab that wouldn't be out of place in Soviet-era Poland. Luckily this spot is close to Central Station, and as a former university hall of residence it almost always has a bed. The 13-bed dorms are crowded, but with the city so handy you'll be partying for most of the night. Some of the midrange options offer better-value singles and twins.

University of Strathclyde Campus Village (☎ 548 4381; www.rescat.strath.ac.uk; Rottenrow East; s B&B £32.50, without bathroom £26.50, 4-/6-bed flats weekly £330/360; 🕒 mid-Jun–Sep) During summer, these halls of residence can be a good bet with accommodation in shared, single-sex, self-catering flats on a weekly basis, or good-value B&B.

MIDRANGE

Adelaide's (☎ 248 4970; www.adelaides.freeserve.co.uk; 209 Bath St; s £30-40, d £50) This big church decided to bless guests with its spacious mint-green rooms that include TVs and bathtubs. The central location and cheery staff are praiseworthy. It's still very much a functioning church so guests can attend services, or even a concert by the Glasgow Symphony Orchestra.

Rennie Mackintosh Hotel (☎ 333 9992; 218-200 Renfrew St; s/d £33/53) This is a pleasant option on the guesthouse-heavy Renfrew St. It's at the top of a steep hill and has SKY TV and a full Scottish breakfast to draw guests in. If you ignore the Mockintosh fittings, this is a solid, straight-up guesthouse that's very handy to Mackintosh's School of Art.

Babbity Bowster (☎ 552 5055; 16 Blackfriars St; s/d £40/55) With a quirky name taken from a Scottish courting dance, it's hard not to be caught up in the rough charm of this roguish pub with six rooms upstairs. The pub may have seen better days, but the rooms are well-presented and you're never far from the action of Merchant City. Breakfast is not included.

Cathedral House Hotel (☎ 552 3519; www.cathedralhousehotel.com; 28 Cathedral Sq; d £65-85; 🅿) With only eight rooms, you'll need to book ahead to be king and queen of this faux-castle, but you'll feel like royalty with the impressive turrets and 19th-century fittings. It's right by the cathedral and rooms are decorated in baronial purples and reds, while breakfasts range from vegetarian to Scottish cuisine.

TOP END

ABode (☎ 221 6789; www.abodehotels.co.uk; 129 Bath St; d ste £125-195) Too big to doss with their mums these days, local lads Franz Ferdinand have been known to bunk down here, as has visiting Eminem. This suave spot has over 60 rooms (with numbers woven into the carpet) with an old-style lift as a centrepiece. All rooms were refurbished in 2006 and come complete with cashmere throws, full baths and DVD players. Suites are even roomier and come with bounteous arrival hampers.

Malmaison (☎ 572 1000; www.malmaison.com; 278 West George St; d from £140, ste £195) Part of a boutique chain that's conquering the UK, the Glasgow chapter is every bit as swanky as you'd expect. Built in a converted Greek Orthodox church, rooms have been individually styled with private CD collections and sink-in baths. Suites have a mezzanine level and the Big Yin (named for Glaswegian Billy Connolly) comes with a swish tartan tub.

West End

BUDGET

Blue Sky Backpackers (☎ 221 1710; www.blueskyhostel.com; 65 Berkeley St; dm/d £10/30; 💻) This party place has fun theme rooms like the Trainspotting dorm and the Red Rum, the latter from *The Shining,* complete with a spooky picture of Jack Nicholson that might keep you awake. The rooms themselves are fairly basic and the kitchen is a little cramped, but this is a good place to sling your bag and go out for the night. Don't confuse this place with other hostels in the street, which aren't as nice.

Bunkum Backpackers (☎ 581 4481; www.bunkumglasgow.co.uk; 26 Hillhead St; dm/tw £12/32) This hard-to-find spot is set in a leafy street and feels miles from the city. There's a homey feel in the spacious dorms (which include lockers), and a comfy lounge room to read in. It's not a wild party place, more a mild relaxing space. Keep your eyes on the street numbers, as it's not well signposted.

Glasgow SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1119; www.syha.org.uk; 7 Park Tce; dm £15; 💻) This austere townhouse perches on a hill above Kelvingrove Park and has wonderful dark-wood interiors. It's large and warren-like, but you can enjoy the spacious TV room and dining room. Unlike some SYHA places there's 24-hour access and breakfast is available (£2.60). From Central Station, take bus 44 and get off at the first stop on Woodlands Rd.

MIDRANGE

Alamo Guest House (☎ 339 2395; www.alamoguesthouse.com; 46 Gray St; s/d from £28/48) Cheerful new owners are steadfastly renovating this old favourite but are equally determined to keep the prices stable. Rooms come in larger sizes than city-based hotels and the beautiful breakfast room looks out on such a tranquil park, that you won't mind the shared facilities. It's a good-value guesthouse that goes the extra mile to make your stay with tips on dining, sightseeing and, most crucially, city parking.

Belhaven Hotel (☎ 339 3222; www.belhavenhotel.com; 15 Belhaven Tce; s/d from £40/65; ♿) This sweet little hotel has plenty to offer since its recent refurbishment, which coloured rooms a rich red and brought out Art Nouveau features like the elegant plaster moulding and tall windows. The in-house bar is a fine place to start your night out.

Devoncove (☎ 334 4000; www.devoncovehotel.com; 931 Sauchiehall St; s £45, d £55-65) There are lots of pleasing details in this well-equipped hotel such as in-room safes, SKY TV and natty dispensers for soap, shampoo and conditioner. Straddling both the city and the West End, this is an ideal spot from which to explore both areas.

TOP END

Hotel du Vin at One Devonshire Gardens (☎ 339 2001; www.onedevonshiregardens.com; 1 Devonshire Gardens; r £155-295, ste £365-925; 💻 wi-fi) Acquired by new owners at the time of research, this spot has the feel of a rather sophisticated hunting lodge spread over a row of terrace houses. This hip hotel has always been a favourite with George Clooney, Madonna and Robert Carlyle when they're in town. All individually designed rooms have lofty ceilings and loads of little extras including DVDs, baths and your very own putter and mini hole for in-room golf on rainy days.

Outside Glasgow

Craigendmuir Caravan Park (☎ 779 4159; Campsie View; 2-person tents £12) This well-equipped camp site is just 4 miles from the city and only 500m from Stepps train station.

EATING

Just because Glasgow is the heart-attack capital of the EU doesn't mean you can't eat healthily here. Most of the best restaurants are in Merchant City and the West End. Many offer a two-/three-course lunch special for as little as £5 and 'pretheatre' evening menus before 7pm, which are both good ways to sample the more expensive restaurants. Several of the pubs listed on p795 also do affordable pub grub.

City Centre

BUDGET

Café Lava (☎ 553 1123; www.cafelava.com; 24 St Andrews St; mains £4-9; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun; 💻 wi-fi) Here, amid modish art, you can power-breakfast with your morning java blast. Scarf down eggs Benedict with Stornoway black pudding while browsing the internet. If blood sausage isn't your perfect start to the day, it also does yummy cakes, as well as more sensible muesli.

Mono (☎ 553 2400; 12 Kings Ct; mains £5-7; 🕒 noon-10pm) Not content to be one of Glasgow's best vegetarian cafés (with special attention paid to vegans), this place also crams in the record- and bookstore Monorail, an organic grocery shop, is an occasional live-music venue and an ale brewery which does a surprisingly good ginger beer. Hearty food such as vegetable bakes and pastas of the day is served in a casual dining space that can get crowded if there's a band in (usually Friday and Saturday nights).

Where the Monkey Sleeps (☎ 226 3406; www.wtms.co.uk; 182 West Regent St; mains £5-9 🕒 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) This funky monkey serves up fresh fruit salads and grilled tortillas but is famous for the Kurgan (there can be only one!), a burger that changes regularly (it could feature prosciutto and rocket one week before slipping back to bacon and cheddar the next). This eatery is down in the basement, and staff like to crank up the Thin Lizzy-esque tunes to rock that hangover out of you.

Also recommended:

Centre for Contemporary Arts (☎ 332 7959; www.cca-glasgow.com; 350 Sauchiehall St; snacks £3-6, meals £6-10; 🕒 11am-9.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun; ♿) Gaze up at the glass roof while munching on the platter of antipasti, or save room for the goo-ily good desserts. See also p795.

13th Note (☎ 553 1638; www.13thnote.co.uk; 50-60 King St; mains £5-8; 🕒 lunch & dinner daily) Another good vegetarian place that does gigs too (see p797)

MIDRANGE

Wee Curry Shop (☎ 353 0777; 7 Buccleuch St; 2-course lunch £4.75, dinner mains £10; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Could there be a better evocation of Scotland's embracing of globalisation than a curry shop decked out in tartan? The Indian food is authentic though, so there's no fear of a faulty balti. The West End has another branch (☎ 357 5280), at 29 Ashton Lane, open for lunch and dinner (dinner mains £10 to £11), which offers similar rogan josh nosh.

Fratelli Sarti (☎ 204 0440; 121 Bath St; pizzas £7-9, meals £8-12; 🕒 8am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) For authentico Italian food that's reasonably priced leave it to the brothers to sort you out. The original Bath St branch has a deli feel, crammed with smallgoods as you gobble down your spaghetti *aglio olio peperoncino* (with olive oil and chilli). The classier restaurant at 133 Wellington St (☎ 248 2228) maintains the tradition with thin-crust but flavoursome pizza straight from the oven, and inventive pastas.

Mao (☎ 564 5161; 84 Brunswick St; mains £9-15; 🕒 noon-11pm; ♿) The chairman would appreciate his portrait given a Warhol-esque treatment lining this pan-Asian eatery. Each dish is a fusion – expect a thumping chutney with a stir-fry or naan pepped up with lemongrass. The wine list is slim, but the large beer range better suits this casual-yet-classic food.

Café Gandolfi (☎ 552 6813; 64 Albion St; mains £10-15; 🕒 9am-11.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun) This Merchant City wizard maintains its place in a busy eating precinct by working innovative magic with Mod Scottish meals that keep locals and tourists crowding its slick interior. There are new twists on old favourites: the oatcakes come with tastier white pudding. The bar downstairs is the perfect place for pre-dinner (and probably post-dinner) cocktails.

West End

BUDGET

Beanscene (☎ 334 6776; Cresswell Lane; sandwiches £3.70; 🕒 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun; 💻 wi-fi ♿) It's impossible to fault this caffeine chain gang that's sprung up around Scotland in the last few years. This West End branch pumps out great coffee, wraps and soups to an adoring student population who also come in for the irregular live music. It's adapted to meet the area's newcomers, with coffee bowls for mums and Scooby snacks menu for kids.

Goat (☎ 357 7373; thegoat.co.uk; 1287 Argyle St; mains £8-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This congenial local boozer has hip leather lounges where you can comfortably read the Sunday papers; upstairs is the best spot for dining and people-watching. The affordable menu runs to salads, pastas and sandwiches, though you can always opt for a liquid lunch with cocktails like the Highland Sling and Loch Almond.

MIDRANGE

Stravaigin 2 (☎ 334 7165; 8 Ruthven Lane; mains £10-13; 🕒 noon-11pm; ♿) A cornerstone of the West End dining scene. Its burgers are widely regarded as Glasgow's best, with accompaniments like Thai salad or chunky chips, but this menu is anything but lowbrow. You can also try first-class haggis, tatties and neeps, as well as a dreamy haloumi-and-bean empanada.

Fanny Trollope's (☎ 564 6464; www.fannytrollopes.co.uk; 1066 Argyle St; mains £10-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Décor is an afterthought at this neighbourhood restaurant, because everyone's focused on the top-notch food. You can chow down on venison haunch swimming in redcurrant jus or herb-crusted baked cod with saffron sauce, just don't ask who Ms Trollope is. The best we could get is that she was known for smoking a clay pipe while wearing a Freudian slip.

Oran Mor (☎ 357 6200; www.oran-mor.co.uk; cnr Great Western & Byers Rds; mains £10-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner) In a restored church, Oran Mor's setting is obviously divine, with stone features and restored massive windows, and the food may also bring you closer to God with Orkney smoked salmon and pan-seared West Coast scallops topping the restaurant menu. The bar serves up simpler fare including pastas and sandwiches. There are also regular events like lunchtime plays, music gigs and the odd session.

TOP END

Ubiquitous Chip (☎ 334 5007; 12 Ashton Lane; set lunch/dinner £21.80/32.80; 🕒 lunch & dinner; ♿) Since the 1970s this straight-up Scottish classic has held its place for innovative work on traditional dishes. If you want to sample a stovie try the delicious apricot and lamb variety here and you'll spare yourself a thousand bad bakeries, otherwise there's Scrabster-landed ling with pepper and seaweed. The Chip has grown huge, with two bars, and sometimes the upstairs-downstairs service can be stretched; our pick is downstairs for fast feeds.

DRINKING

Whether it's a wee dram or a New World wine, Glaswegians aren't shy of drink, so it's no surprise that some of Scotland's best nightlife can be found in Glasgow's pubs and bars. The famous Glaswegian 'style bar' is a welcome move away from the traditional spit-and-sawdust boozer. Merchant City is the epicentre of fashionable drinking with any number of different concept-bars, while Sauchiehall St has mainstream boozers that attract their fair share of buck's and hen's nights. The West End promises inventive spots to keep the student population out later than their essay deadlines.

City Centre

Red Lizard (☎ 552 3539; 51 Bell St) Sink into plush couches and armchairs and you may never want to leave this loungey bar. Given pride of place amid the gold-and-orange wallpaper are Brit kitsch relics, like *Minder Annual*s, which give a sense of the offbeat crowd this place attracts. Cocktails are advised.

Arches (☎ 565 1000; 253 Argyle St) This nightclub-cum–experimental theatre is always a good spot for a wine underneath Central Station. A rainbow of lights softens the industrial feel while flirty staff serve the crowd who pop in here on their way to or from the station.

Variety (☎ 332 4449; cnr Elmbank & Sauchiehall Sts) This Art Deco watering hole attracts a mixed crowd. Among the heaving bars of Sauchiehall St, this cosy one-room bar is a good place for a quiet drink and a chat.

Bloc (☎ 574 6066; www.bloc.ru; 117 Bath St) With a late licence that brings in young drinkers, this buzzing basement bar with a Soviet Union theme has bands and local DJs spinning into the wee hours. Look for the hammer-and-sickle iconography that chips away at the more conservative neighbours in Bath St.

Nice 'n' Sleazy (☎ 333 0900; www.nicensleazy.com; 421 Sauchiehall St) Better known as plain old Sleazys to locals, this casual bar attracts a young crowd who appreciates the cheap drinks and '70s décor, even if most of them weren't even born then. A well-stocked jukebox kicks in with indie classics when there isn't a local band or DJ.

Centre for Contemporary Arts (☎ 332 7521; 350 Sauchiehall St) Popular with the boho crowd, this is one of the more refined spots for a relaxed drink on Sauchiehall St. Occasional DJs shake it up, but it's never as mad as other places on this strip.

Other recommendations:

Waxy O'Connor's (☎ 354 5154; 44 West George St) An Irish bar that hasn't sold its soul, with a cavernous layout that is even more disorientating after a few too many.

Babbity Bowster (☎ 552 5055; 16 Blackfriars St) A dignified town-house pub in the middle of Merchant City. It attracts an older crowd with real ale.

West End

Tchai Ovna (☎ 357 4524; www.tchaiovna.com; Otago Lane) There's no shame in resting your liver with a good cup of tea in this cosy Bohemian den (it's based on Czech tea houses) frequented by local indie kids. Its dizzying range of teas, eclectic décor (no single chair matches any other) and good vegetarian grub make it a good spot to recover from a hangover.

Uisge Beatha (☎ 564 1596; 232-246 Woodlands Rd) The collection of hunting trophies (including a well-bagged Maggie Thatcher) and portraits of smug nobility on the walls of this place bristle at the mention of the city's style bars. This place is a traditional boozer with a reputation for impromptu sessions and over a hundred whiskies; no wonder it's named 'water of life' after Scotland's national spirit.

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

With the introduction of nonsmoking in 2006, Glasgow's grimiest pubs have had a breath of fresh air, but spare a thought for smokers. Many congregate out the front of pubs or on the street for their quick puff in the cold. Here are a few venues with outdoor areas where you can light up without leaving:

Babbity Bowster (☎ 552 5055; 16 Blackfriars St) Has a great beer garden for summer days.

Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA; ☎ 332 7521; 350 Sauchiehall St) There's outdoor seating here where you can happily puff on even the stinkiest cigar.

Tchai Ovna (☎ 357 4524; www.tchaiovna.com; Otago Lane) With views of the river, the outdoor area here is the perfect spot for a breath of not-so-fresh air, especially since it sells the lung-straining shisha pipes (£7) in flavours like molasses, mint and coconut.

Jinty McGinty's (☎ 339 0747; 23 Ashton Lane) If you think Irish pubs are all bolted-down leprechauns and blarney, then this little pub will change your mind with its warm welcome, nightly folk sessions and brimming pints of the black stuff. You can snuggle up in one of the booths and peruse Ireland's literary legends on the walls.

Booly Mardy's (☎ 560 8004; www.bloodymarys.co.uk; 28 Vinicombe St) After a copyright tussle, this cocktail bar took on an anagram of its original name, but didn't change its long drinks list. It's patronised by a smart set that has been known to include BBC TV stars (or at least their make-up people) who enjoy the loungey feel and the reasonable prices. Just don't order the vodka and tomato juice!

Other recommendations:

Oran Mor (☎ 357 6200; www.oran-mor.co.uk; cnr Great Western & Byers Rds) A restored church that makes an atmospheric drinking spot.

Radio (☎ 334 6688; 46 Ashton Lane) With comfy couches, this upstairs bar transmits to a student crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

The *List* (£2.20) is an invaluable fortnightly events guide available at newsagents and bookshops, which details everything happening in both Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Cinemas

Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT; ☎ 332 8128; www.gft.org.uk; 12 Rose St; adult/concession £4.50/3.50) This is the city's best cinema for classic art-house, international independent films and frequent screenings themed on a particular genre or director.

Cineworld (☎ 0871 200 2000; www.cineworld.co.uk; 7 Renfrew St; adult/child £6.20/4.90) Reputedly the world's tallest cinema complex when it opened at the turn of the millennium, this place does similarly big films.

Grosvenor (☎ 339 8444; www.grosvenorcinema.co.uk; Ashton Lane, West End; adult/child £5.50-6.50/3.50) This highly regarded movie house is a Glasgow favourite, showing edgier mainstream releases and offering discounts during the day.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Glasgow's vibrant scene centres on Merchant City, with a few good West End bars. **Glasgay** (☎ 334 7126; www.glasgay.co.uk) is a performing arts festival held around October/November, spotlighting the gay, lesbian and transgender community.

Waterloo Bar (☎ 229 5890; cnr Wellington & Argyle St) This less-sceney traditional pub is Scotland's oldest gay bar. The all-ages crowd includes a large, welcoming group of regulars.

Revolver (☎ 553 2456; 6a John St) Less a 'go for your gun' pick-up joint and more of a comfortable hang-out, this downstairs spot attracts a relaxed crowd for its laid-back feel and free jukebox.

Live Music

Buoyed by the success of Franz Ferdinand and music festivals like T in the Park (see below), Glasgow has Scotland's best live scene. As well as the venues listed below, several of the bars and clubs listed have frequent live acts or folk-music sessions.

King Tut's Wah Wah Hut (☎ 221 5279; www.kingtuts.co.uk; 272a St Vincent St; 🕑 Mon-Sat) Reigning over the city's music scene, this classic upstairs band room is known for indie, rock, punk and hardcore, but also embraces hip-hop and dance. It's so big it's just started its own record label, but you wouldn't know it from this intimate venue. Gigs sell out quickly so keep an eye on the website. Opens Sunday if there's a gig on.

ANYONE FOR T?

Scotland's most celebrated musical festival by far is **T in the Park** (www.tinthepark.com), which draws folk from Glasgow and Edinburgh to Balado every July. North of the border, it's *the* place to see hot up-and-coming bands, particularly Scottish bands.

For aspiring Franz Ferdinands there's a chance to play the big gig in **T Break** (www.tbreak.co.uk), an annual battle of the bands with hopefuls from across Scotland. Because of Glasgow's many venues, the city is always represented in the music competition, which accepts demo CDs from across Scotland.

T Break heats are held throughout May and June, featuring many of the best bands you've never heard of (and you can tell everyone you were into them long before anyone else was). The great thing about these heats is that each band gets a 20-minute set, so in one night you hear a selection of great bands and still get to sample a few pints.

In Glasgow the heats are held at the King Tut's Wah Wah Hut (above) while in Edinburgh there are heats at the Liquid Room (p769).

Nice 'n' Sleazy (☎ 333 0900; www.nicensleazy.com; 421 Sauchiehall St) Sleazys is the ideal atmosphere in which to see some of Glasgow's up-and-coming bands, with cheesy décor and a leaning towards rock acts (though other genres can be heard).

Barrowland (☎ 552 4601; www.glasgow-barrowland.com; 244 Gallowgate) A former dance hall that's lavishly decorated and renowned for its good acoustics, this venue is a reason to start a band in Glasgow. Gigs range from international visitors to local lads and lasses made good and, whatever you see, it's an unforgettable night out.

13th Note (☎ 553 1638; www.13thnote.co.uk; 50-60 King St) Papered with indie band posters, the downstairs band room brings in some of Glasgow's alternative bands and is known for giving unknowns a go.

Also recommended:

ABC (☎ 553 2232; 300-330 Sauchiehall St) A big venue for national touring acts.

Bloc (☎ 574 6066; www.bloc.ru; 117 Bath St) Has weekend bands and DJs.

Carling Academy (☎ 0870 771 2000; www.glasgow-academy.co.uk; Eglington St) A newer spot that hosts big visitors.

Garage (☎ 332 1120; www.garageglasgow.co.uk; 490 Sauchiehall St) Packs them in with live music in four rooms.

On the River Clyde, the **Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre** (SECC; ☎ 0870 040 4000; www.secc.co.uk; Finnieston Quay) and the adjoining **Clyde Auditorium** (same contact details) cater for the big acts to hit the city. The acoustics are better in the auditorium than the hangar-like SECC, but tickets are pricey.

Nightclubs

The Glasgow club scene is always producing a new 'now' spot. Glaswegians hit the clubs after the pubs close, so many clubs offer a discounted admission and cheaper drinks before 11pm. Entry to most clubs is between £4 and £8, although bars often offer free passes to nearby clubs. Club nights tend to change venues regularly, so check the *List*.

Arches (☎ 565 1000; www.thearches.co.uk; 253 Argyle St; admission £8-13; 🕑 Fri-Sun) One of Scotland's top clubs, reliably pulling top DJs from across Europe. There's something on most nights under the atmospheric girders of Central Station. Music spans old-school techno to happy hardcore. It's also one of the city's best bars (p795).

Glasgow School of Art (☎ 332 0691; 169 Renfrew St; admission £5-8; 🕑 Tue-Sun) For those in the know, this destination has innovative music, from some of the best hip-hop north of the border on Saturdays to drum 'n' bass that packs the checkerboard dance floor.

Cathouse (☎ 248 6606; www.cathouseglasgow.co.uk; 15 Union St; admission £4; 🕑 Thu-Sat) This three-floor spot attracts rock, metal, indie, Goth, industrial and emo fans, so you might need a little more eyeshadow and at least a black t-shirt.

Sport

Scottish football is dominated by the 'Old Firm', **Celtic** (seltic; ☎ 551 8653; www.celticfc.co.uk; Celtic Park, Parkhead) and **Rangers** (☎ 0870 600 1972; www.rangers.co.uk; Ibrox Stadium, 150 Edmiston Dr), whose rivalry divides Glasgow down the middle.

Scotland plays international matches at **Hampden Park** (☎ 620 4000; www.hampdenpark.co.uk; stadium tour adult/child £6/3), a stadium that also holds the **Scottish Football Museum** (☎ 616 6139; Hampden Park; adult/child £5.50/2.75). The museum has a Hall of Fame and offers a chance to re-live classic moments in Scottish football. Tours of the stadium include the players' warm-up area and the chance to hear the Hampden Roar as you walk through the tunnel.

Theatre

Theatre Royal (☎ 332 9000; www.theatreroyalglasgow.com; 282 Hope St; ♿) Hosting the Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet, this venue is one of the city's major performance spaces. Cheap standby tickets are available for some performances; ask at the box office.

Citizens' Theatre (Citz; ☎ 429 0022; 119 Gorbals St; tickets £6-15) This space hosts some of Scotland's premiere performances, particularly old favourites given new life and debut Scottish plays.

SHOPPING

London aside, Glasgow is one of the UK's premier shopping destinations. Its high street is packed with international fashion chains, while independent shops cluster along Great Western and Byres Rds in the West End.

Couture vultures swoop on **Versace** (☎ 552 6510) in the stylish **Italian Centre** (John St). Alternatively, **Designer Exchange** (☎ 221 6898; 3 Royal Exchange Ct) stocks cheaper samples and resale designer labels. Fashionable boutiques line Sauchiehall, Argyle and Buchanan Sts.

You can't go past the flea market every weekend at the **Barras** (☎ 552 7258; London Rd), but for more traditional Scottish fashion, **Geoffrey (Tailor) Kiltmaker** (☎ 331 2388; 309 Sauchiehall St) has the best take-home tartan. There are a few good boutiques hidden around the West End, such as the designer **Moon** (☎ 339 2315; www.moonofglasgow.co.uk; 10 Ruthven Lane) and vintage specialist **Starry Starry Night** (☎ 334 4778; 21 Dowanside Lane). Elsewhere, **Dr Jives** (☎ 552 5451; 111 Candleriggs) sells a unisex range including tees for lads and street clothes for ladies.

In the West End, you could spend plenty of time browsing diverse shops such as **OneWorld** (☎ 357 1567; 100 Byres Rd), which stocks an eclectic range of arty gifts from around the globe, all of them fair-traded; **Fopp** (☎ 357 0774; 358 Byres Rd), a cheap independent Scottish record outlet; or **Voltaire & Rousseau** (☎ 339 1811; 18 Otago Lane), a great secondhand bookstore. **Monorail** (☎ 552 9458; www.monorailmusic.com; 12 Kings Ct; ⏰ noon-8pm) stocks the best selection of indie and local vinyl, with a secondhand section that includes Italian horror and Brazilian pop sections.

In the centre, hit **Robert Graham & Co** (☎ 221 6588; 71 St Vincent St) for an excellent selection of malt whiskies and cigars.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Eight miles west of the city near Paisley, **Glasgow Airport** (☎ 887 1111; www.baa.co.uk/glasgow) handles domestic traffic and international flights, including some direct transatlantic routes. It's the main airport for most of the Scottish islands. **Glasgow Prestwick airport** (☎ 0871 223 0700; www.gpia.co.uk), 30 miles southwest of Glasgow, is used by the budget carrier Ryanair.

easyJet (☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com) flies between Glasgow Airport and several British destinations including London Stansted (one way from £18, 1¼ hours, five daily), and also to/from Amsterdam (one way from £23, 1¾ hours, one daily).

Ryanair (☎ 0870 156 9569; www.ryanair.com) flies between Prestwick and London Stansted (one way from £12, 1¼ hours, six daily), and to/from European destinations including Dublin (one way from £13, 45 minutes, about four flights daily) and Paris (one way from £22, 1½ hours, up to four daily).

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) and its subsidiaries service many mainland and island destinations from Glasgow, including Stornoway (return from £93, one hour, two daily) and Sumburgh in the Shetland Islands (return from £151, 2½ hours, two daily).

Bus

Long-distance buses arrive at **Buchanan bus station** (Killermont St). Bus fares from London are competitive. **Silver Choice** (☎ 01355 249 499; www.silverchoicetravel.co.uk) currently offers the cheapest deal for advance purchase (return from £24, 8½ hours, departs 10pm daily from London's Victoria Coach Station and Glasgow). The service is popular so you'll need to book.

Megabus (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com) also does a London bus (one-way fares from £10), which sells off its website.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs the same route (return from £30, nine hours, up to four daily). There's also a daily direct bus from Heathrow airport, usually leaving at 11.05pm.

National Express also runs services to/from Birmingham (£40.50, six to eight hours, four daily); Cambridge (£46, 10¼ hours); at least nine from Carlisle (£16, two hours); one from Newcastle (£25.50, four hours); and one from York (£29.50, seven hours).

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) has buses to most major towns in Scotland. There are buses to Edinburgh (£4, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes). There are also frequent buses daily to the following: Stirling (£4.50, 45 minutes), Inverness (£16.70, four hours) and Aberdeen (£17.20, 3½ hours). Heading up the west coast, there are buses to Oban (£13.10, three hours, three daily), Fort William (£14, three hours, four daily) and Portree (£25, 6½ hours, three daily).

For Northern Ireland buses run via Stranraer to connect with ferries to Belfast (one way £20, six hours, two daily from Glasgow).

Stagecoach Express (☎ 01592-261461; www.stagecoachbus.com) operates services to Anstruther (three hours, hourly) and St Andrews (return £10, 2¼ hours, hourly).

Car

There are numerous car-rental companies; the big names have offices at the airport.

Other operators include **Arnold Clark** (☎ 0845 607 4500; www.arnoldclark.co.uk; 43 Allison St) and **Clarkson** (☎ 771 3990; www.clarksonofglasgow.com; 89 Byres Rd).

Train

Glasgow has two train stations. Generally, Central Station serves southern Scotland, England and Wales, and Queen St serves the Scotland's and east. There are buses every 10 minutes between the two (50p or free with a through train ticket), or it's a 10-minute walk.

There are direct trains from London's King's Cross and Euston stations; they're not cheap, but they're much quicker (£86, 5½ hours, 10 direct daily) and more comfortable than the bus. You can get much cheaper fares if you book in advance.

First ScotRail (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstgroup.com/scotrail/index.php) runs the West Highland line heading north to Oban and Fort William, and other direct links to Dundee (£22.50), Aberdeen (£34) and Inverness (£34). There are trains every 15 to 30 minutes to/from Edinburgh (£8.60, 50 minutes).

Virgin Trains (☎ 204 7960; www.virgin.com/trains) has discount tickets from London, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Bristol, Bournemouth and Plymouth; check its website for the latest prices.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

There are bus services between Glasgow Airport and Buchanan bus station (single/return £3.30/5, 25 minutes, every 15 minutes daily). A taxi costs around £20 to the centre. You can get to Prestwick by bus on the X99 route (single/return £8/12, 1¾ hours, hourly) or train (www.firstgroup.com/scotrail; 50 minutes, every half-hour).

Bicycle

You'd have to be mad to hire a bike in Glasgow. **West End Cycles** (☎ 357 1344; 16 Chancellor St; day/week rental £15/85; ⏰ 10am-5.45pm Mon-Sat) embraces such insanity, renting out 24-speed mountain bikes.

Boat

You can get to Braehead Shopping Centre, home of the Clydebuilt Museum, on the **Pride o' the Clyde** (☎ 07711 250 969; www.clydewaterbusservices.co.uk; Central Station Bridge; single/return £3/5), a waterbus (five to six sailings daily) that's a great way to see the regeneration taking place along the Clyde and avoid the city congestion.

Car

A convoluted one-way system and dead-end streets will leave you feeling like you're trying to navigate a pretzel. Expensive and limited parking makes driving an unattractive proposition, though parking is easier in the West End. The motorway (M8) makes getting into/out of the city easy.

Public Transport

The **St Enoch Square Travel Centre** (☎ 226 4826; ⏰ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), in the centre of St Enoch Sq, provides information on all transport in the Glasgow region. Here you can get a copy of the complicated but useful *Glasgow Mapmate* (£1), which shows all local bus routes run by First. You can buy tickets when you board local buses, but on most you must have exact change. Most fares around the city are £1. After midnight there are limited night buses from George Sq.

The circular Underground line serves 15 stations in the city's centre, west and south (£1). The Discovery Ticket (£1.70) gives unlimited travel after 9.30am on the Underground system for a day. The Roundabout Glasgow ticket (adult/child £4.50/2.25) covers all Underground and bus transport in the city for a day.

Taxi

You can hail a black cab from the street or call **Glasgow-Wide Taxis** (☎ 429 7070). Otherwise there's a rank on Gordon St, just opposite Glasgow Central Station.

LANARKSHIRE

Glasgow's sprawl has meant that satellite towns like East Kilbride, Hamilton, Motherwell, Coatbridge and Airdrie have been swallowed by the city. Lanarkshire's biggest attraction is the birthplace museum of David Livingstone in Blantyre, although the Clyde Valley's scenic tangle of foliage, wildlife and waterfalls is another draw.

On the riverbank is the World Heritage Site of New Lanark, a fascinating renovation of a 19th-century cotton mill and the houses of the workers who ran it.

BLANTYRE

☎ 01698 / pop 17,300

David Livingstone's birthplace was founded as a cotton mill in the late 18th century, but Livingstone would hardly recognise his hometown today, as it has become a rather depressing dormitory suburb of Glasgow. The house where he was born, however, has been preserved as an excellent museum.

The **David Livingstone Centre** (NTS; ☎ 823140; 165 Station Rd; adult/child £5/4; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Christmas; ♿) traces the life of the busy doctor, missionary and explorer from his early days in Blantyre to the 30 years he spent in Africa famously waiting for Stanley. Kids will love the chance to dress up as a millworker, though the displays about Livingstone's opposition to slavery could prove heavy going.

Buses stop on Main St, but it's best to come to Blantyre by train from Glasgow Central (20 minutes, twice hourly).

LANARK & NEW LANARK

☎ **01555 / pop 8250**

Below the market town of Lanark, the World Heritage Site of New Lanark is a fascinating collection of restored mill buildings and warehouses in an attractive gorge by the River Clyde. Once the largest cotton-spinning complex in Britain, the mill was built in 1785 to take advantage of the fast-flowing Clyde. You'll need at least half a day to explore this large site; there's plenty to see.

From 1800 Robert Owen managed the mill, introducing social reforms unheard of during the greed-is-good Industrial Revolution. Owen provided his workers with housing, a cooperative store, the first nursery school for children, adult-education classes, a sick-pay fund for workers and a social centre he called the New Institute for the Formation of Character.

Orientation & Information

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 661661; Horsemarket, Ladyacre Rd; 🕐 10am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, Sun Easter-Sep) is in Lanark, right by the adjacent bus and train stations. New Lanark is a mile downhill from here.

Sights

Wandering the streets of New Lanark you can hear the echo of a once-great industrial centre in the river that drove a mighty cotton mill.

At the **visitors centre** (☎ 661345; www.newlanark.org; adult/child £5.95/4.95; 🕐 11am-5pm; ♿ most sections) you can buy a ticket to all the main attractions. These include the **New Millennium Experience**, an innovative high-tech ride through New Lanark's past and possible future. The visit continues to the din of a huge working spinning mule, producing woollen yarn – the only fabric to be made here since the mills closed in 1968. Robert Owen's **school** has interactive exhibitions on 'saving New Lanark', as well as the **Annie McLeod Experience**, a high-tech audio-visual display where the spirit of a 10-year-old mill girl describes life here in 1820. The large globe in the classroom is always a favourite with littlies, plus kids get to wear cotton tunics as if they were in Owen's school.

After you've seen New Lanark you can then walk up to the **Falls of Clyde** through the beautiful nature reserve. Before you go, drop into the **Falls of Clyde Wildlife Centre** (☎ 665262; fallsofclyde@swt.org.uk; admission free; 🕐 11am-5pm Mar-Dec, noon-4pm Jan & Feb) by the river in New Lanark. There are wildlife and conservation exhibitions and you can organise bat walks (£2.50) or badger-watching (£5). The riverside path takes you 2.5 miles to the beautiful **Cora Linn** (waterfalls that inspired both Turner and Wordsworth). The Clyde is enchanting here, bubbling joyously over the rocks; it seems a different river from its sterner incarnation in Glasgow.

Sleeping

New Lanark SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1143; www.syha.org.uk; Wee Row; dm adult/child £11.50/9; 🕐 Mar-Oct; 💻) A bit like your gran with an iPod, this place is a curious mix of old and new. It has four-bed dorms with en suites and other facilities. Using the modern kitchen or the internet feels anachronistic in this authentic, old mill building.

Summerlea (☎ 664889; 32 Hyndford Rd; s £25, d & tw £48) Near Lanark's tourist office, this guesthouse specialises in twin rooms, with one large single room that's painted lilac. It's handy if you want to stay in Lanark, but New Lanark is within walking distance.

New Lanark Mill Hotel (☎ 667200; www.newlanark.org; s/d from £69.50/109, cottages per week from £265) Definitely the spot to stay if you can part with the pounds, this slick hotel has views across the mill and river. The original building has been completely refurbished to give a modern feel and the cottages are particularly peaceful.

Eating & Drinking

Crown Tavern (☎ 664639; 17 Hope St; mains £9-12, bar meals £7; 🕐 bar meals lunch & dinner, restaurant dinner only) Just off the main street, this cheery, highly regarded pub does good bar meals, with a restaurant upstairs that has a solid menu featuring Highland chicken and generous pastas.

New Lanark Mill Hotel (☎ 667200; www.newlanark.org; New Lanark; bar meals £4-8, 2-course dinner £17, 🕐 bar meals 11am-9.30pm Sun-Thu, 11am-6pm Fri & Sat, restaurant dinner daily & lunch Sun; ♿) Easily the best place to eat in town, the Falls Bar does superior pub grub, while upstairs the restaurant serves more elaborate meals. The restaurant specialises in Scottish meat and fish like Border lamb roasted in garlic, and does an excellent Sunday roast.

Getting There & Around

Lanark is 25 miles southeast of Glasgow. Trains (£4.60, one hour, hourly) run from Glasgow Central Station. There are also express buses from Glasgow (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday).

There's an hourly bus service from the train station in Lanark with the last bus leaving New Lanark at 4.42pm (6.50pm Sunday). If you need a taxi, call **Clydewide** (☎ 663221).

SCOTTISH BORDERS

The history of Scotland has been played out along the Borders, from grisly territorial skirmishes to serene monastic monuments, all put to page by local hero Sir Walter Scott. The troubled relationship with the south stretches back to the Romans, with impressive castles and keeps evolving to stave off raiders. But it wasn't all warmongering: small burghs supported monastic communities in abbeys that served as centres of religion and scholarship from the 12th century. As borders lapped back and forth, abbeys and castles were destroyed by waves of raids, only to be rebuilt during peace.

Some of the most visited sites today are the ruins that have emerged from this turbulent history. Walkers and cyclists combine health and history to take in ruins on several trails, in between enjoying historic inns and coaching houses. The scenic River Tweed slices through the Borders creating some beautiful vistas, and there's also world-class fishing.

Day-trippers from Edinburgh and England's north know the Border's charms, but it's often overlooked by international visitors, so midweek travellers could have serene abbeys or eerie castles all to themselves.

Activities

Tourist offices along the border have a number of brochures, including *Cycling, Walking* and *Fishing in the Scottish Borders*. Walking possibilities include the challenging coast-to-coast **Southern Upland Way, St Cuthbert's Way** (www.scot-borders.co.uk/stcuthbertsway) and **Borders Abbeys Way**, which links the border abbeys of Kelso, Jedburgh, Melrose and Dryburgh in a 65-mile circuit for walkers. The 55-mile **Four Abbeys Cycle Route** is a similar route for cyclists, well marked with blue signs.

For cyclists there is also a range of trails in the Tweed Valley and Glentress Forest Park, well marked and detailed in brochures available from tourist offices in the region, as well as the **Border Loop**, a signposted 250-mile circuit right around the Borders.

Fishing the Tweed is a lifelong ambition for anglers, with salmon fishing in private lochs also popular. Find out more about booking (well in advance) loch and river fishing at **FishTweed** (☎ 01573-470 612; www.fishtweed.co.uk). For a guided experience try **Tweed Guide** (☎ 01750-22279; www.tweedguide.com; 3/6hr session from £60/80), which operates out of Melrose, Selkirk, Galashiels and Kelso.

Getting Around

There's a good network of local buses, although they are comparatively expensive. **First** (☎ 08708 72 72 71; www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/scotland/sescot/home) operates between the border towns and connects the larger towns with Edinburgh as well as Berwick-upon-Tweed. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) services between Edinburgh and Newcastle/Leeds stop in Jedburgh and Galashiels.

Useful local bus companies serving border towns include **Munro's of Jedburgh** (☎ 01835-862253) and **Buskers** (☎ 01896-755808; Galashiels).

PEEBLES

☎ **01721 / pop 8100**

For most visitors Peebles is an endearing town, set amid rolling hills with an idyllic river, but fisherfolk know better. The River Tweed is legendary trout water that some wait their whole life to fish. Other outdoor enthusiasts enjoy strolling among the wooded hills on a variety of short trails.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; peebles@scot-borders.co.uk; High St; 🕐 daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is exceptionally helpful.

Sights & Activities

There are several good walks around town, like the **Venlaw walk** (3 miles) just north of town that follows an old coach path and links to other longer trails including the **John Buchan Way** to Broughton (13 miles). For more details pick up the pamphlet *Tweed Trails* from tourist offices. It's an easy stroll to **Neidpath Castle**

(☎ 720333; adult/child £3/1.75; 🕐 10.30am-5pm Wed-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun May-Sep), a 14th-century tower house on a bluff above the River Tweed about 1 mile west of town.

Poke your head inside **Tweeddale Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 724820; High St; admission free; 🕐 10am-1pm & 2-5pm), a small museum dedicated to literature and border sons such as Sir Walter Scott.

Peebles is a good spot for fly-fishing in the Tweed; get useful tips at **Cast Around Peebles** (☎ 729229; 20A Northgate; licence per day £8, rod hire £18; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat). There are also several good mountain-biking tracks in Tweed Valley Forest including **Glentress** (www.7stanes.gov.uk), a mountain-biking mecca which has trails from beginners to advanced. The **Hub** (☎ 721736; www.thehubintheforest.co.uk; 1-day hire £18) offers mountain-bike hire, sales and repairs.

Sleeping & Eating

Whities (☎ 721605; www.whities.co.uk; 69 High St; d £75) With large church-like windows and a quaint bookstore downstairs, this charming spot does a superior class of B&B that includes clawfoot baths and even fireplaces in some rooms. Breakfasts including haggis and pastries are worth getting up for.

Cross Keys Hotel (☎ 724222; Northgate; s/d £32/56) This historic former coaching inn has several rooms which vary markedly in size, but are all pleasant. The brasserie (mains £6 to £13) offers tasty meals.

Halycon Restaurant (☎ 725100; www.halcyonrestaurant.com; 39 Eastgate; mains £11-20; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) In a side lane off the main street, this hidden gem is the place for posh nosh in town. The menu runs to tempting mains like coley with lobster risotto, but save room for dessert.

Oven Door (☎ 723456; 24 High St; snacks £2-6; 🕐 10am-9.30pm) With a bounty of scones and cakes, this is the top spot for a snack, plus it does a choice of filter or real coffee, with a big beautiful oven door to boot.

Getting There & Away

The bus stop is beside the post office on Eastgate. First bus 62 runs to/from Edinburgh (£4, one hour, every half-hour) and to Galashiels (45 minutes, hourly) and Melrose (1¼ hours, hourly).

AROUND PEEBLES

Traquair House

One of Britain's great noble residences, **Traquair House** (☎ 01896-830323; www.traquair.co.uk; adult/child £6.20/3.30; 🕐 noon-5pm Apr-May & Sep, 10.30am-5.30pm Jun-Aug, 11am-4pm Oct) is believed to have been constructed long before the first official record of its existence in 1107. The massive tower house was gradually expanded over the next 500 years, but has remained virtually unchanged since 1642.

Since the 15th century the house has belonged to various branches of the Stuart family, whose unwavering Catholicism and loyalty to the Stuart cause is largely why development ceased when it did. One of the most fascinating features is the concealed room where priests secretly lived and conducted Mass – up to the passing of the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act. Other beautiful timeworn rooms hold fascinating relics, including the cradle Mary Queen of Scots used for her son, James VI.

More recent attractions will appeal to kids, including a maze and adventure playground, while the brewery engages adults. You can even stay in one of three elegant rooms (singles £100, doubles £180), complete with canopied beds and rich surrounds; these have to be prebooked. The house is set in beautiful parkland with several woodland walks and secluded picnic spots.

The house is 1.5 miles south of Innerleithen, about 6 miles southeast of Peebles. Bus C1 departs Peebles at 10.15am for Traquair daily and returns at 2.50pm.

SELKIRK

☎ 01750 / pop 5740

Once throbbing with machinery, today this prosperous 19th-century mill town is quiet and quaint. Significantly Walter Scott was sheriff here for three decades and used the stability of the job to create some of his greatest writing.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; off Market Pl; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun late Mar-Sep, except 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun Oct) includes **Halliwell's House**, a museum with mocked-up historical grocery stores, displays about common riding and an out-of-place exhibition of local artists. **Sir Walter Scott's Courtroom** (☎ 720096; Market Pl; admission free; 🕐 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Apr-Sep, also 10am-2pm Sun May-Aug, 1-4pm Mon-Sat Oct) features eerie mannequins of Scott as local sheriff (which could almost still punish visitors), as well as displays on his literature.

There's better accommodation in Melrose, but if you want to overnight here try the cosy **County Hotel** (☎ 721233; www.countyhotelselkirk.co.uk; Market Sq; s/d from £39/69), a former coaching inn that's been well refitted. It also serves lunch and dinner (meals £7 to £9).

First Edinburgh buses 73 and 95 run half-hourly Monday to Friday (hourly on Saturday) to Galashiels and Edinburgh (£4.50, 1½ hours). Bus 72 links Selkirk and Melrose (20 minutes, hourly, three on Sunday).

MELROSE

☎ 01896 / pop 1650

In summer this township is a garden basket of flowers at the foot of the Eildon Hills… and don't the tourist hordes know it. Still it's a pleasing contrast to overbearing Galashiels, whose urban sprawl laps at its western edges. Melrose's classic market square and striking abbey ruins are strong drawcards for the town, but walkers and cyclists will be keen to get out into the Eildons.

Information

The super-friendly and helpful **tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; Abbey House; 🕐 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-5.30pm daily Jul & Aug), across from Melrose Abbey, has masses of information on all of Britain.

Sights & Activities

MELROSE ABBEY

The most stunning of the Border abbeys, **Melrose Abbey** (HS; ☎ 822562; adult/child £4.50/2; 🕐 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) was destroyed repeatedly by the English in the 14th century. Rebuilt in the 15th century in a surprisingly ornate style for the Cistercian order, it was never completed, and by the time of the Reformation only 15 monks remained in the once-thriving community. The vestiges are pure Gothic and the ruins are famous for their decorative stonework. To catch the different colours brought out by varying light (from dawn pinks to sombre greys), several visits to the abbey are recommended.

Founded by King David I in 1136 for Cistercian monks from Rievaulx in Yorkshire, the abbey was rebuilt by Robert the Bruce. After his death, Robert's heart was sealed in a casket and, according to his wishes, borne by the Black Douglas into battle against the Moors in the Spanish Reconquista. Despite Douglas' death, the well-travelled heart was recovered and brought back here for solemn interment.

WALKING & CYCLING

The three volcanically formed hills surrounding the town are known as the **Eildons** and afford good day-walks. The coast-to-coast **Southern Upland Way** and the **Tweed Cycleway** pass through Melrose. **St Cuthbert's Way** (www.scot-borders.co.uk/stcuthbertsway) begins at the abbey before heading across the border for 62 miles to Lindisfarne. From Melrose to Dryburgh (roughly 18 miles) is one of the more spectacular legs of the Borders Abbeys Way (see p806), making it a popular way to sample this longer walk. The **Roman Heritage Way** (www.romanheritageway.com) is a northern limb of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail (see p633), a long-haul walk that takes in several Roman ruins.

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Edinburgh-born Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) became the literary voice of Scotland's history. He developed a fascination for folk stories and ballads when as a sick child he was moved to his uncle's farm at Sandyknowe (p805). These stories formed the basis for his multivolume *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. After studying in Edinburgh he was appointed sheriff in Selkirk and bought Abbotsford (p804), a country house where Scott wrote obsessively, until his death, to stave off bankruptcy.

Scott wrote a number of successful ballads. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) was an early critical success; further works earning him an international reputation included *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), set around the Trossachs. He later turned his hand to novels and virtually invented the historical genre, earning the moniker the Wizard of the North. *Waverley* (1814) dealt with the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. Other works included *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *Rob Roy* (1817). His works virtually single-handedly revived interest in Scottish history and legend in the early 19th century.

Tourist offices stock a *Sir Walter Scott Trail* booklet that takes you to many places associated with his life in the Borders.

Good day-walks are detailed in *Walks Around Melrose* (£1), while short cycle trips are detailed in *Melrose: Local Cycling Trails* (free), both available at the tourist office.

Sleeping

If you've got your own transport don't be shy of nearby villages like Earlston and Newstead (a three-quarter-mile walk from the abbey); accommodation here can be booked through the tourist office.

Melrose SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1141; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; ⏲ Mar-Oct; 💻) Just a stroll from the abbey (in fact you can glimpse it from the 2nd floor), this Georgian mansion features new mattresses and a library with great views. The massive, old building has a great central staircase. This is a serious walkers' bunkhouse, so party animals should crash elsewhere.

Fiorlin (☎ 822984; www.melrose.bordernet.co.uk/fiorlin; Abbey St; d £60) This spacious, well-furnished family home offers relaxed rooms with a breakfast that includes a fruit platter for a healthy start. It's off-street location (in a small alley) also means it's a quieter spot with plenty of parking.

Station (☎ 822038; Market Sq; s/d £40/75) Decked out in ochres and browns, this sophisticated spot has only five rooms, all with generous bathrooms, flat-screen TVs and an excellent breakfast downstairs in Gary Moore's Restaurant at the Station.

Other recommendations:

Dumfermline House (☎ 822411; Buccleuch St; s/d £27.50/55) A reliable B&B in a central spot.

Braidwood (☎ 822488; www.braidwoodmelrose.co.uk; Buccleuch St; s/d from £35/55) Very near the abbey, with high-quality facilities and a warm welcome.

Burt's Hotel (☎ 822285; www.burtshotel.co.uk; Market Sq; s/d £56/106) Retains period charm and offers indulgent, luxury accommodation.

Townhouse (☎ 823474; Market Sq; s/d £65/96) Across the road is Burt's big sister, with more class and extras like a Jacuzzi.

Eating

All of Melrose's pubs offer excellent food, including vegetarian options.

our pick **Gary Moore's Restaurant at the Station** (☎ 822038; www.garymoorerestaurants.com; Market Sq; lunch £5-8, dinner £8-18; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Local chef Moore is fast becoming the doyen of Borders cuisine for his estate-sourced produce. Even his lunchtime sandwiches are delicious constructions (like Ayrshire ham, roasted pepper and mozzarella paninis), while dinner could include gnocchi with grilled Mediterranean vegetables. A sophisticated dining room and menu that changes monthly complete the package.

Marmions Brasserie (☎ 822245; Buccleuch St; lunch £5-9, dinner £7-17; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This suave eatery is resplendent with flowers on tables and rich oak panelling throughout. Dinner is a lavish affair often involving game, but lunches offer an affordable way to sample some excellent cuisine, albeit with a simpler, stripped-down menu.

Getting There & Away

First buses run frequently to Jedburgh (30 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday), Peebles (1¼ hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday) and Edinburgh (£5, 2¼ hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday).

AROUND MELROSE

Dryburgh Abbey

The most complete exemplar of the Borders' religious architecture is **Dryburgh Abbey** (HS; ☎ 01835-822381; adult/child £4/1.60; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿). Partly due to it's out-of-the-way location by the Tweed, Dryburgh was only ransacked three times by the English after its construction in 1150. It's a time capsule of 12th-century monastic life as it belonged to the Premonstratensians, a religious order also called the White Canons, who were probably relocated here from Northumbrian Abbey in Alnwick. The pink-hued stone ruins were chosen as the burial place for Sir Walter Scott, as well as the notoriously incompetent WWI leader Field Marshall Earl Haig. Pack a picnic to enjoy among the mighty redwoods and cedars that shelter the abbey.

The abbey is 5 miles southeast of Melrose on the B6404, which passes famous **Scott's View** overlooking the valley and the **William Wallace Monument**, a small statue inscribed 'Great Patriot Hero. Ill Requited Chief'.

Abbotsford House

For a window into Sir Walter Scott's daily life drop by his former residence, **Abbotsford House** (☎ 01896-752043; www.scottsabbotsford.co.uk; adult/child £5/2.50; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat late-Mar–Oct, 2-5pm Sun Mar-May & Oct, 9.30am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep). The writer lived here for 20 years until his death in 1832, amassing an intriguing collection of literature, with a library that numbers 9000 volumes, and Scottish relics such as Rob Roy's gun, dirk (dagger) and sword.

The house is about 2 miles west of Melrose between the River Tweed and the B6360. Frequent buses run between Galashiels and Melrose; alight at the Tweedbank roundabout and follow the signposts (it's a 15-minute walk).

KELSO & AROUND

☎ 01573 / pop 5116

Where the River Treviot meets the Tweed is this prosperous town, with a broad market square at its heart flanked by Georgian buildings. With excessive local pride Scott remarked that Kelso was 'the most beautiful, if not the most romantic town in Scotland', though today this seems like hyperbole.

Information

Kelso Library (☎ 223171; Bowmont St; ⏲ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Tue, Thu & Fri, plus 5.30-7pm Tue & Thu, 10am-1pm Wed, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 0870 608 0404; kelso@scot-borders.co.uk; Town House, The Square; ⏲ daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) On the main plaza; has limited information.

Sights

KELSO ABBEY

Once the largest of the Border abbeys, picturesque **Kelso Abbey** (HS; admission free; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) was ransacked by English armies during the 16th century. The surviving west end dates from the 12th century and was originally built by the Tironensians, an order originally founded in Picardy.

Nearby, the 18th-century **Old Parish Church** (⏲ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri May-Sep) breaks with architectural tradition with its curious octagonal design.

FLOORS CASTLE

Flamboyant **Floors Castle** (☎ 223333; adult/child £6/3.25; ⏲ 10am-4.30pm Easter-Oct) is Scotland's largest inhabited house. Built by William Adam in the 1720s, its original Georgian simplicity was 'improved' during the 1840s with the addition of rather ridiculous battlements and turrets.

Inside, the drawing room's vivid-toned 17th-century Flemish tapestries and intricate oak carvings in the ornate ballroom always impress. Palatial windows unfurl a ribbon of green countryside extending well beyond the estate. While the real owners are the Dukes of Roxburghe, this building made a cameo as Tarzan's ancestral home in the film *Greystoke*.

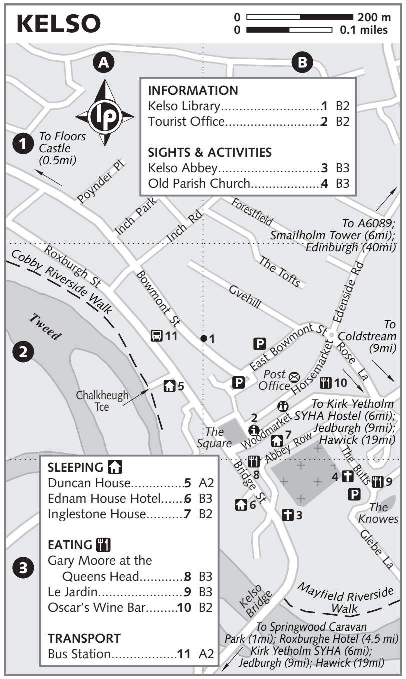
SMAILHOLM TOWER

Perched on a rocky knoll 6 miles west of Kelso, **Smailholm Tower** (HS; ☎ 460365; adult/child £3/1.30; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm daily Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) affords panoramic views as well as being a spectacular sight itself. It's easy to imagine the bloody border clashes from this stone tower; inside are rather unconvincing costumed dummies and tapestries depicting Scott's characters from *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

On the way to the tower is the farmyard of **Sandyknowe**, once owned by Scott's grandfather. Scott was brought here as a sick child and was inspired by the local ballads and stories, along with his ancestor's ruined tower. Take the B6397 a mile south of Smailholm village to see this epic sight.

Activities

The **Pennine Way**, which starts at Edale in the Peak District, ends at Kirk Yetholm, 6 miles southeast of Kelso, where most walkers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Poynder Pl
Inch Park
Inch Rd
Forestfield
To A6089; Smailholm Tower (6mi); Edinburgh (40mi)
Roxburgh St
Cobby Riverside Walk
Bowmont St
The Tofts
Gvehill
Edenside Rd
Tweed
East Bowmont St
To Coldstream (9mi)
Rose La
Post Office
Horsemarket
Chalkheugh Tce
To Kirk Yetholm SYHA Hostel (6mi); Jedburgh (9mi); Hawick (19mi)
The Square
Woodmarket
Abbey Row
The Butts
Bridge St
The Knowes
Glebe La
Kelso Bridge
Mayfield Riverside Walk
To Springwood Caravan Park (1mi); Roxburghe Hotel (4.5 mi) Kirk Yetholm SYHA (6mi); Jedburgh (9mi); Hawick (19mi)

celebrate with a drink at the Border Inn and stay at the Kirk Yetholm SYHA Hostel.

A popular walk with strollers is the **Borders Abbeys Way**, which links the area's abbeys in a 65-mile circuit, one for hikers and one for cyclists. Both cycle and hiking routes run from Kelso to Melrose. The tourist office has free leaflets with map and description of the routes, as well as another detailing other cycling trails around the town.

Less ambitious walkers can take the riverside path to Floors Castle, signposted off Roxburgh St, just off the Square. The free tourist office leaflet, *Walter Scott's Kelso*, gives an orientation around town that takes just under an hour.

The famous **Junction Pool** marks the point where the Rivers Treviot and Tweed meet and **salmon fishing** is legendary here. But great fishing isn't cheap and you can expect to pay from £1000 per day with bookings years in advance. The tourist office has details on less expensive options at other points along the Tweed.

Sleeping & Eating

Kelso's dining scene still hasn't caught up with its surfeit of accommodation, which probably explains why the tourist office has several three-day deals on self-catering cottages.

Kirk Yetholm SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1132; Kirk Yetholm; dm £12; ⏰ Apr-Sep) All the talk at this hostel 6 miles southeast of Kelso is about comparing how much mud you'd got on your boots as you completed the final leg of the Pennine Way or St Cuthberts Way. It's a basic hostel that compensates with congenial staff. Bus 81 runs to/from Kelso up to seven times daily from Monday to Saturday (three times on Sunday).

Duncan House (☎ 225682; www.tweedbreaks.co.uk; 2 Chalkheugh Tce; s/d £45/64) This spot, overlooking a tempting stretch of the Tweed, is a great base for anglers. Rooms have been refitted but retain period features like clawfoot baths. There's smoked salmon and kippers at breakfast in case you can't hook a fish later in the day. The owner's passion for angling means he offers tips on using salmon rods, and supplies rods and tackle. It's a little like your own gaming retreat, complete with affectionate hunting dogs.

Ednam House Hotel (☎ 224168; www.ednamhouse.com; Bridge St; s/d from £65/97, cottage £90) Set on the riverbank, this Georgian house has been successfully transformed into a stylish hotel. Rooms are done out in bright custardy hues and while rooms with river views will push up the budget, you can always enjoy the same scene from the excellent restaurant (two-course dinner £18; open for lunch and dinner). A separate cottage on the grounds is a more intimate option.

Roxburghe Hotel (☎ 01573 450331; www.roxburghe.net; Heiton by Kelso; s/d £134/170; 💻) Owned by the Duke of Roxburghe (you'll meet his ancestor's portraits on the way in), this former estate office gives guests the royal treatment. Expect elegant rooms and four-posters aplenty, but failed Prince Charmings may prefer to hit the hotel's golf course or go shooting. To get here, tell your driver to take the A698 to Heiton.

Gary Moore at the Queen's Head (☎ 228899; 24 Bridge St; lunch £5-8, dinner £8-18; ⏰ lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) The saviour of Borders' dining makes a foray into Kelso with this understated dining room that does innovative seafood, such as cod roasted in bacon, cherry tomatoes and house-made basil pesto.

Oscars Wine Bar (☎ 224008; www.oscars-kelso.com; 35-37 Horsemarket; mains £13-18; ⏰ dinner) This hip spot's offerings range from a casual menu of fajitas or mouthwatering rack of lamb to more elaborate dishes like corn-fed breast of duck.

Other recommendations:

Springwood Caravan Park (☎ 224596; admin@springwood.biz; tent sites £12; ⏰ Mar-Oct; ♿) A massive park that attracts a cheerful camping community.

Inglestone House (☎ 225800; Abbey Row; s/d/tr £40/55/75) Close to the abbey, this lovely spot has spacious baths and refined décor.

Border Inn (☎ 01573 420237; www.theborderhotel.com; Kirk Yetholm; s/d £40/80) Traditional spot to stop for post-walk ale or meal (£6 to £10); comfy rooms.

Le Jardin (☎ 228288; 5a The Knowes; snacks £4-6; ⏰ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) A sweet spot near the abbey; good snacks and cakes.

Getting There & Away

Munro's run regular buses to Edinburgh, some involving a connection (£6, two hours, five to eight daily). There are also very frequent departures for Jedburgh (25 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday) and Galashiels via Melrose (55 minutes, hourly).

JEDBURGH

☎ 01835 / pop 4090

This township was once such a target of cross-border raids that during the 15th century the Scots destroyed the burgh's castle to prevent it falling into English hands. Fortunately other elements of the garrison survived, to be assaulted anew today by camera-wielding invaders from the south. Jedburgh is the first stop across the border on the A68, and is possibly the most popular border town, with ingeniously restored historic buildings and wynds (narrow alleys) that encourage exploration on foot.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 0404; www.scot-borders.co.uk; Murray's Green; ⏰ daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) has a bureau de change. The **library** (Castlegate; ⏰ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 5.30-7pm Mon & Fri), just up the hill from Marketplace, has free internet access.

Sights

Dominating the town skyline, **Jedburgh Abbey** (HS; ☎ 863925; adult/child £4/1.60; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿ with notice) is impressive even as a ruin. The red sandstone remains are roofless, with the jutting ribs suggesting a much larger structure. The abbey was originally founded in 1138 by King David I as a priory for Augustinian canons from Beauvais in France; their monastic community is re-created with a herb garden and audiovisual display. The staircase in the nave is slippery when wet, but climbing it is worth it for the stunning view.

Scotland's much-loved monarch reputedly stayed in 1566 at the 16th-century tower house now known as **Mary Queen of Scots Visitors Centre** (☎ 863331; Queen St; adult/child £3/free; ⏰ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun Mar-Nov). Among the limited displays are the last letter she wrote before her execution, and her death mask.

Uphill from the town square, **Jedburgh Castle Jail & Museum** (☎ 864750; adult/child £2/1.50; ⏰ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun April-Oct, closed Nov-Mar) is another relic of Jedburgh's troubled past. Built in 1823, it served as a debtor's prison, and the grim recreation of cells will have you paying off your credit cards. Kids can dress up as Romans and there's an audio tour (free with admission) that tells of a ghostly history.

Sleeping

Reiver's Rest (☎ 864977; www.reiversrest.co.uk; 91 Bongate St; s/d £26/40) This one-room wonder has a big double bed and sauna that shames some Edinburgh hotels. It's an ideal spot for a romantic weekend and, best of all, the owners won't hear of a price rise.

Maplebank (☎ 862051; www.bandbjedburgh.com; 3 Smiths Wynd; s/d with shared bathroom £16/32) Stay across from Mary Queen of Scots at this casual and central B&B with light, spacious rooms. There are loads of choices for breakfast, from fruit to fry-ups.

Other recommendations:

Froylehurst (☎ 862477; Friars off Exchange St; s/d £25/44) Has views over the thatched roofs of town and some chintzy decoration.

Glenbank House Hotel (☎ 862258; www.glenbankhotel.co.uk; Castlegate; s/d from £44/60) Features spacious en suites with a full bath in every room.

Eating

Nightjar (☎ 862552; 1 Abbey Close; mains £8-10; ⏰ dinner Tue-Sat) This intimate (OK, small) bistro could be mistaken for a tearoom with its simple décor, but it's actually a sophisticated dining spot with baked halloumi cheese and marsala-stewed calf's liver on the menu. If you arrive before 7pm there's a two-course special (£12.50), plus the last Tuesday of every month features a special Thai menu.

Cookie Jar (37 High St; breakfast £5, snacks £3-6; ⏰ 10am-5pm) This refreshingly unpretentious tearoom serves up good-quality sandwiches, cakes and slices, alongside some strong coffee.

Getting There & Away

Jedburgh has regular bus connections to Hawick (25 minutes, roughly hourly), Melrose (30 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday) and Kelso (25 minutes, up to 11 daily Monday to Saturday, four Sunday). Munro's bus 29 runs from Edinburgh to Jedburgh (£5.60, two hours, up to 10 daily Monday to Saturday, five Sunday).

HERMITAGE CASTLE

The foreboding **Hermitage Castle** (HS; ☎ 01387-770244; adult/child £3.50/1.30; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct & Nov) was strategically vital in Borders campaigns and holds a uniquely grim place in Scottish history.

Mary Queen of Scots famously visited the wounded Lord Bothwell here in 1566. Fortified, he recovered to (probably) murder her husband, marry her himself, then abandon her months later and flee into exile. Another infamous resident of the castle was Lord de Soulis, who called on demons to secure the castle against Robert the Bruce, though the king had his vengeance when Soulis was boiled in oil. No wonder the castle is said to be haunted.

Portions of the castle were repaired in the 19th century with extensions like the parapets and crowstep gables added. More recent repairs have maintained the castle but the interior is surprisingly plain, though the grisly dungeon has inspired many tales including those of Lord Douglas starving his prisoners to death. To avoid a similar fate, you should pack a picnic to enjoy outside the forbidding walls.

The castle is 12 miles south of Hawick on the B6357, and 5.5 miles northeast of Newcastleton, a mile off the B6339.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Blessed with local literati Robbie Burns to immortalise the tales of this area (and create a tourist industry), southwestern Scotland may already be familiar in verse to many visitors. Summer is particularly attractive in this area with mild and sunny weather that has allowed the development of some famous gardens as well as great art.

Attractions abound: superb Caerlaverock Castle is one of the most beautifully situated castles in the country; further west is Kirkcudbright, a town so perfectly positioned that it has been drawing artists for decades. Bibliophiles romp through a plethora of bookstores in Wigtown on the Machars peninsula while, further on, the crucible of Scottish religion is at Whithorn Cathedral, a mission predating St Columba on Iona by over 150 years.

If it's all feeling like too much then you can always skip across to Northern Ireland from the ferry port of Stranraer or take time out at nearby Portpatrick, a soothing harbour on a rugged stretch of Galloway coast.

Getting There & Around

Eurolines (☎ 0870 514 3219) operates bus services between London and Belfast, via Birmingham, Manchester, Dumfries, the towns along the A75, and Stranraer.

Local bus operators cover the region comprehensively. The principal operators are **McEwan's** (☎ 01387-256533) and **Stagecoach Western** (☎ 01387-260383).

Two train lines from Carlisle to Glasgow cross the region, via Dumfries and Moffat respectively. The line from Glasgow to Stranraer runs via Ayr.

DUMFRIES

☎ 01387 / pop 31,000

With the magnificent River Nith flowing through town, Dumfries is known as the Queen of the South. Picturesque red-sandstone bridges span the river and Burns enthusiasts flock to the museums and to the pub the poet once sunk a dram or 20 in.

Information

Library (☎ 253820; Catherine St; ⏰ Mon-Sat) Free internet access to check your emails, in a real architectural treasure.

Tourist office (☎ 253862; 64 Whitesands; ⏰ daily Apr–mid-Oct, Mon-Sat mid–Oct-Mar) Opposite the car park by the river; stacks of information on the whole region.

Sights

There are several good walks detailed in leaflets from the tourist office, but real Burners should try the **Burns Trail**, a stroll that takes in the river and most major sights.

Dumfries Museum & Camera Obscura (☎ 255297; www.dumgal.gov.uk/museums; Rotchell Rd; museum admission free, camera adult/child £1.90/95p; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) is a collection of local historical oddments, including the camera obscura in the tower. The device was originally built to observe the Transit of Venus and a tour shows how the ropes and levers manipulate an image of the town.

Robert Burns Centre (RBC; ☎ 264808; Mill Rd; admission free, audiovisual adult/child £1.60/90p; ⏰ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) is an award-winning museum located in an old mill on the banks of the River Nith. It relates the story of Burns and Dumfries in the 1790s, including a scale model of the town and a 20-minute audiovisual show.

Red-sandstone **Burns House** (☎ 255297; Burns St; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar), where the poet spent his last years, features personal relics. Look for his signature scratched into an upstairs window. Nearby, his **mausoleum** is in the graveyard at St Michael's Kirk. Back in the centre at the top of High St is a **statue** of the bard.

Sleeping

There's a good selection of B&Bs along Lovers Walk and around into Moffat Rd.

Glenure (☎ 252 373; www.glenurebnb.co.uk; 43 Moffat Rd; s/d £28/48) This well-equipped guesthouse has several single rooms that are almost like hotel rooms, complete with desks and en suites, plus a well-selected video collection and a really great breakfast selection.

Hazeldean House (☎ 266178; 4 Moffat St; s/d £30/52) This pleasant guesthouse offers a warm welcome and varying rooms (sizes vary so check one out before you check in). You'll know it by the terrifying eagle out the front (which will make you think twice about pinching those guest towels).

Ferintosh Guest House (☎ 252262; www.ferintosh.net; 30 Lovers Walk; s £35, d & tw £50-54) When you change the name of your place to reflect Robbie Burns' whisky of choice, you almost have to offer your guests a free dram. Luckily it's not the only change, with American and Scottish owners redecorating here with great results: Red Rose is a good twin room for golfing buddies (just buddies!) and breakfast comes with haggis and salmon. It's still handy to the train station and rooms are still bright.

Eating & Drinking

Globe Inn (☎ 252335; www.globeinndumfries.co.uk; 56 High St; bar meals £4-6; ⏰ lunch & dinner daily) Hidden down a narrow wynd, this traditional howf (pub or shelter) was reputedly one of Robbie Burns' favourites. There's plenty of memorabilia on the walls to attest to this, but the bard probably would have enjoyed a tug on the folklorically inspired fruit machine, Sir Win-a-lot. It's as much a locals' bar as a tourist haunt.

Hullabaloo (☎ 259679; www.hullabaloorestaurant.co.uk; Mill Rd; mains £8-16; ⏰ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Set in the Robert Burns Centre, this playful eatery has something for everyone from its Really Meaty Kebab (which crams every imaginable form of flesh on a skewer) to flavoursome stuffed squash.

our pick **Linen Room** (☎ 255 689; www.linenroom.com; 53 St Michael St; starters £6-9, mains £14-18; ⏰ dinner) Dumfries' best restaurant combines metropolitan sophistication with country prices and locally sourced produce. From the selection of breads (and three different butters as well) to the poussin gorgeously presented on the plate as a butterfly, everything about this restaurant will impress. Local chef Russel R Robertson has created one of southern Scotland's best.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Eurolines and National Express run buses 920 and 921 twice daily between London and Belfast, via Carlisle, Dumfries, towns along the A75 and Stranraer; London to Dumfries is £29.

Local buses run regularly to Kirkcudbright (1¼ hours, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) and towns along the A75 to Stranraer (£6, 2¼ hours, eight daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

Bus 100 runs to/from Edinburgh (£5.50, 2¾ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday), via Moffat and Biggar.

TRAIN

There are trains to Carlisle (£7.10, 35 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday), and direct to Glasgow (£10.70, 1¾ hours, eight daily, two on Sunday).

AROUND DUMFRIES

Caerlaverock Castle

The ruins of **Caerlaverock Castle** (HS; ☎ 01387-770244; by Glencaple; adult/child £4.50/2; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿), on a stretch of the Solway coast, are idyllic. Surrounded by a moat, lawns and stands of trees, the unusual pink-hued, triangular, stone castle looks impregnable – but it fell several times. The present castle dates from the late 13th century. Inside, there's an extraordinary Scottish Renaissance façade to apartments built in 1634. The castle is 8 miles southeast of Dumfries on the B725. Monday to Saturday, Stagecoach Western bus 371 runs nine times a day (twice Sunday) to the castle from Dumfries.

A mile further on is **Caerlaverock Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre** (☎ 01387-770200; www.wwt.org.uk; Eastpark Farm; adult/child £3.60/2.20; ⏰ 10am-5pm), a 1,400-acre nature reserve with observation towers and CCTV spy cameras to spot badgers, wild swans and hen harriers.

WORTH THE TRIP

Threave Castle (HS; ☎ 07711-223101; adult/child £3.50/1.50; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep) About 3 miles west of the town of Castle Douglas, off the A75, is this imposing tower on a small island in the River Dee. A ferry takes you across the river with a guide who cheerily tells you the site's grim history. Built by the cheerfully named Archibald the Grim in 1369, the castle withheld several sieges mainly due to its high artillery defensive walls and river-based supply lines. It's a great spot for youngsters to frolic, but you can't leave them in the pit prison.

It's a 10-minute steep walk from the car park to the small ferry and wheelchair users must be able to get out of their chairs for the river crossing.

Ruthwell Cross

Just beyond Caerlaverock, in Ruthwell, the **church** (☎ 01387-870249; admission free by calling keyholder) holds one of Europe's most significant Christian monuments: **Ruthwell Cross**. The 6m-high crucifix is inscribed with New Testament scenes along with the poem *The Dream of the Rood,* written in a Saxon runic alphabet, and one of the earliest examples of English-language literature. Built in the mid-7th century to defy the Roman Church's increasing control, the cross was soon condemned as idolatrous and buried until the 19th century, when it was resurrected in its current location.

Sweethearts Abbey

This crumbling, moss-crusted **abbey** (HS, ☎ 01387-850260; adult/child £2/80p; New Abbey; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6.30pm Sun, closed Fri Oct-Mar) is a romantic antidote to all the stuffy museums. Monks named the building to honour Devorgilla de Balliol, who was widowed by John Balliol, benefactor of Oxford College. When her husband died she took her love to the grisly extreme of embalming his heart and carrying it with her for over 20 years until her own death. You can see an image of her in the south transept, and she's buried in the presbytery.

KIRKCUDBRIGHT

☎ 01557 / pop 3400

Like all great artists Kirkcudbright (pronounced kir-*koo*-bree) was unrecognised in its prime but is being capitalised on after its time. A different Robert Burns (Head of Painting at Glasgow University) once commented that no student's education was complete without a visit to Kirkcudbright, and with the pleasing sun and ocean views you can see how it would inspire great art. Once the home to noted painter and ceramicist Jessie M King, as well as several visiting Glaswegian artists, this seaside spot has become prime real estate, particularly its 17th- and 18th-century merchants' houses and spacious harbourfront. The town also featured in the spooky cult film *The Wicker Man*.

The **tourist office** (☎ 330494; kirkcudbright@dgtb.visitscotland.com; Harbour Sq; ⏰ daily Mar-Nov, Mon-Fri Dec-Feb) can give you information on exploring the coast.

Sights & Activities

To get in touch with Kirkcudbright's aesthetic, wander down High St to the **Tollbooth Art Centre** (☎ 331556; High St; admission free; ⏰ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat May, 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), which has a modern gallery and a fascinating AV show telling the history of Jessie M King and EJ Hornel.

MacLellan's Castle (HS; ☎ 331856; adult/child £3/1.30; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep) was originally built in the 16th century and came to be adapted more for domesticity than war with chimneys instead of battlements. Inside, look for the 'lairds' lug', a 16th-century spyhole designed for the laird to eavesdrop on his guests.

Nearby, the 17th-century **Broughton House** (NTS; ☎ 330437; 12 High St; adult/child £8/5; ⏰ noon-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun, noon-5pm daily Jul-Aug, closed Sep-Mar) was bought by painter EJ Hornel for £650 in 1901 and today shows his work, as well as scenes from his daily life. Regular changing exhibits from his personal collection are also displayed and there's a large collection of Burns paraphernalia.

Sleeping & Eating

The guesthouses on High St tend to be more expensive than those on nearby streets.

Greengate (☎ 331895; www.thegreengate.co.uk; 46 High St; s/d £40/60) This was once the home of Jessie M King, and you can still see the quaint artist cottages out the back. Today it's all luxury with in-room CD players, spacious bathtubs and a comfy lounge of stuffed leather chairs on the 1st floor. Look out for top hats and bowlers decorating some rooms.

Number 1 B&B (☎ 330 540; www.number1bedandbreakfast.co.uk; 1 Castle Gardens; s/d £40/64) This new spot has bright rooms with castle views and the bonus of a spa in one double. Breakfasts are noteworthy as they're prepared by the owner who once cooked for royalty (the Queen Mum and Prince Charles, no less).

Belfry Cafe (☎ 330861; cnr of St Mary & St Cuthberts Sts; meals £3-6; ⏰ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) With roasts, toasties and sandwiches, this unpretentious spot serves none of your tourist muck. It's affable and affordable.

Auld Alliance (☎ 330569; 5 Castle St; mains £10-16; ⏰ dinner daily, lunch Sun Apr-Oct) Named for the political alliance between Scotland and France, this is the hottest table in town. The menu fuses French flair with local seafood accompanied by a sound wine list.

Other recommendations:

Silvercraigs Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 330123; Silvercraigs Rd; tent sites from £8.70) A brilliant spot overlooking the town.

Anchorlee B&B (☎ 330197; www.anchorlee.co.uk; 95 St Mary St; d £30-40) A large house with stained-glass windows, serving great breakfasts.

Getting There & Away

There are regular local buses to/from Dumfries (1¼ hours, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday). In the other direction buses go to Stranraer (1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday).

NEWTON STEWART

☎ 01671 / pop 3573

On one bank of the sparkling River Cree, Newton Stewart is a convenient base for anglers and walkers to explore some beautiful countryside. The **tourist office** (☎ 402431; Dashwood Sq; ⏰ Apr-Oct) is just off High St.

Most accommodation is in Minnigaff, a village just across the bridge. **Minnigaff SYHA** (☎ 0870 004 1142; tents £6, dm £13; ⏰ Apr-Sep) is in a spruced-up former school that retains features like high windows (so pupils couldn't look out for distraction). **Galloway Arms** (☎ 402653; www.gallowayarmshotel.net; 54-58 Victoria St; s/d £30/60) is a surprisingly swish spot with renovated rooms, some of which have glittering toilet seats to give your bum the star treatment. The bar serves above-par pub grub.

Newton Stewart has regular National Express/Eurolines buses running between Stranraer (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) and Dumfries (1½ hours, six daily from Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday). Frequent buses also run south to Wigtown and Whithorn.

MACHARS PENINSULA

The triangular wedge south of Newtown Stewart is where the Galloway Hills ease into the pastures of the Machars peninsula. The south is blessed with several early Christian sites and the 25-mile **Pilgrims Way**.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 415 runs every hour Monday to Saturday (every two hours on Sunday) from Newton Stewart to Whithorn (one hour) via Wigtown (15 minutes).

Wigtown

☎ 01988 / pop 987

With a bookstore for every 50 residents, Scotland's national book town (www.wigtown-booktown.co.uk) is the perfect spot for browsing through endless secondhand collections.

The **library** (Market Sq; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon, Thu & Sat, 10am-7.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 2-5pm Sun) has free internet, plus CCTV to watch nesting ospreys, for free, upstairs.

Lining the town's central bowling green are several specialist stores that really come into their own during the town's **book festivals** (www.wigtownbookfestival.com).

If you're planning a weekend of browsing, there are rooms at **Mora House** (☎ 403410; 10 Bank St; s/d £30/50), a good B&B that has added luxuries like chocolates and some knowledgeable owners.

Of the many (and ever-changing) bookshops, here are a few favourites:

451f (☎ 402515; www.451f.org.uk; 29 South Main St; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Collects a curious mix of poetry, sci-fi and comics, including Brit classics like *Beano* and *Dandy*.

Book Corner (☎ 402010; 2 High St; www.mccormicknicholson.co.uk/book-cnr-wigtown1.htm; ⏰ daily May-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Apr) A Tardis-like store that has a huge general range and some great Scottish tourist books.

Byre Books (☎ 0845 458 3813; www.byrebooks.co.uk; 24 South Main St; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Just off the main street; does Scottish myths, folklore, theatre and film.

M E McCarty Bookseller (☎ 402062; 13 North Main St; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm daily Mar-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Wed, Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) Well-stocked secondhand collection with signed 1st editions, plus they have the expansive Book Vaults (19 Bank St).

Reading Lasses Bookshop Café (☎ 403266; 17 South Main St; www.reading-lasses.com; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, noon-5pm Sun May-Oct) Specialises in women's literature and nonfiction; has a buzzing café that does amazing baked treats.

In neighbouring **Bladnoch** there are a few more bookish options and, for bored nonreaders, **Bladnoch Distillery** (☎ 4062 2842; Bladnoch; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sun Jul-Aug), Scotland's southernmost distillery.

Whithorn

☎ 01988 / pop 870

Whithorn's grand High St originally enclosed a medieval market, though today it seems worse for wear. The town is worth visiting, because in AD 397 St Ninian moved the frontier of Christianity beyond Hadrian's Wall by founding the first Christian mission here (predating St Columba on Iona by 166 years).

Whithorn Priory's rambling ruins were built to house St Ninian's remains and were once the focus of an important medieval pilgrimage. Today they form the centrepiece for the **Whithorn Experience** (HS; ☎ 500508; www.whithorn.com; 45 George St; admission £2.70; ⏲ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct), an audiovisual display and museum that houses the Latinus Stone (c 450), reputedly Scotland's oldest Christian artefact. Young Indiana Joneses also get the chance to try their hand on a mocked-up archaeological dig here.

Isle of Whithorn

☎ 01988 / pop 400

This tiny, scrappy fishing village was once an island unto itself but has become a peninsula with an attractive harbour. A short walk from the township, **St Ninian's Chapel** is a humble ruin, originally built for pilgrims who landed nearby, and there's a sweet **Witness Cairn,** where the bereaved lay stones in tribute to the dead. There are also several nice walks around the area, plus **Machars Cycleway**.

Steam Packet Inn Hotel (☎ 500334; www.steampacketinn.com; Harbour Row; mains £5-9) is a popular pub with dependable (if unimaginative) bar meals and comfortable lodging (singles/doubles from £30/60).

STRANRAER

☎ 01776 / pop 10,850

This port is a workhorse lugging cargo to Belfast, so most visitors only stay on their way to Northern Ireland. To avoid a slow crawl through shallow waters there are plans to move the ferry terminal to nearby Cairnryan, which gave rise to plans to develop Stranraer as a marina. For the moment though it remains a rough-around-the-edges spot where locals pop across to Belfast to do their shopping.

Information

Post office (☎ 702587; Charlotte St) In Tescos.

Stranraer Library (☎ 707400; North Strand St; ⏲ Mon-Sat) Located near the tourist office; has free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 702595; stranraer@dgtb.visitscotland.com; 28 Harbour St; ⏲ daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Carries all the ferry timetables.

Sights

St John's Castle (☎ 705544; George St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Easter–mid-Sep) has a few models and a bit of history with two audiovisual films about the area, plus great bay views from the tower.

Stranraer Museum (☎ 705088; 55 George St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) covers local history, but if you're not digging the oldest plough in Scotland, there are good revolving exhibits.

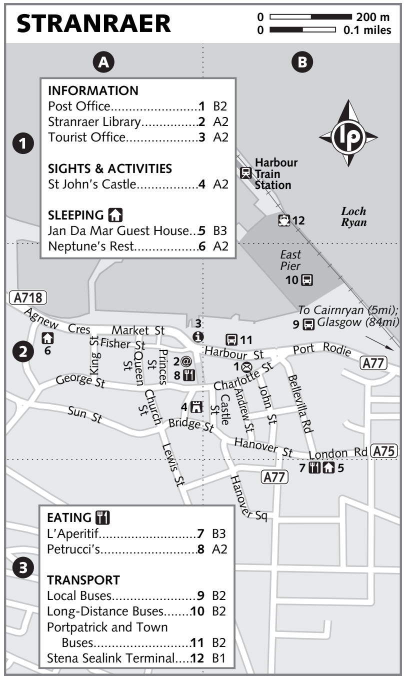
Sleeping & Eating

There are several guesthouse options on the always popular Agnew Cres.

Jan Da Mar Guest House (☎ 706194; www.jandamar.co.uk; 1 Ivy Pl, London Rd; s/d from £20/36) The great bonus at this large B&B are its effusive hosts, who will go out of their way to give advice or supply board games for rainy days. Rooms themselves are bright and the upper storey has good views of the township.

Neptune's Rest (☎ 704729; 24 Agnew Cres; s £22-28, d £50) Handy for early/late ferries, this place has sweet little rooms bedecked with seafaring paraphernalia (look out for the diver's helmet). Pricier rooms have en suites.

L'Aperitif (☎ 702991; London Rd; mains £6-12; ⏲ lunch & dinner) King of the hill geographically and gastronomically, this restaurant does authentic homestyle Italian. The pizzas are great, but fresh pasta with free garlic bread is tough to beat.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Harbour St
Port Rodie
George St
Charlotte St
Sun St
Church St
Castle St
Andrew St
John St
Bellevilla Rd
Bridge St
Hanover St
London Rd
Lewis St
Hanover Sq

Petrucci's (☎ 705837; 2-6 George St; pizzas £5-7, fish suppers £3.4; ⏲ 11am-11pm) There's a glut of pizzerias and chippers around the main streets, but this is the best, particularly for its undefeatable Big Yin breakfast made for starving sailors.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

There are two alternatives from Stranraer to reach Northern Ireland: **P&O** (☎ 0870 242 4777; www.poirishsea.com) ferries from Cairnryan to Larne (Northern Ireland); and **Stena Line** (☎ 08705 707070; www.stenaline.com) ferries from Stranraer to Belfast, with Stena offering affordable day trips (from £20) and internet bargains.

The Cairnryan to Larne service is used mainly by motorists and hauliers. Cairnryan is 5 miles north of Stranraer, on the northern side of Loch Ryan. Bus 358 runs there frequently.

BUS

Eurolines buses head to London via Dumfries, Manchester and Birmingham.

Citylink is the best bus service to Glasgow (£10, 2½ hours, two daily); it meets the ferries from Belfast. There are also local buses to Kirkcudbright (1½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and towns on the A75, eg Newton Stewart (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) and Dumfries (£5.40, two hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

TRAIN

The train station is on the ferry pier. There are regular services to/from Glasgow (£15.60, 2½ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday), although only some are direct.

PORTPATRICK

☎ 01776 / pop 585

This sweet little marina once served as the main port for Northern Ireland, with Irish couples hopping across to enjoy Scotland's easier marriage laws in the 19th century. Today it's a coastguard station with a strip of beach that makes for great rock-hopping, and the starting point for the 212-mile Southern Upland Way (see p783).

There are plenty of guesthouses along North Cres and Blair Terrace. **Knowe Guest House** (☎ 810441; www.theknowe.co.uk; 1 North Cres; s/d from £35/54) offers contemporary en-suite rooms with unbeatable harbour views. Downstairs is **Tysties Coffee Shop** (snacks £3-6; ⏲ 9am-4pm Mar-Sep), which does scrumptious slices, cakes and light meals. Another good accommodation option is **Mansewood** (☎ 810255; Dean Pl; d £50), with bright if plainish rooms in an elevated stone house.

For food there are a couple of pubs along the harbour, but our favourite is the **Crown** (☎ 810261; www.crownportpatrick.com; 9 North Cres; mains £6-17; ⏲ lunch & dinner daily), best known for its superb seafood. The top table in town is at **Campbells** (☎ 810314; 1 South Cres; mains £8-17; ⏲ lunch & dinner daily), with a subdued dining room by the sea that excels at seafood but does equally brilliant grills.

Local bus 367 runs to Stranraer hourly Monday to Saturday (three times on Sunday).

AYRSHIRE

Even if you've only got a passing interest in Robbie Burns, you'll find yourself drawn into his story as you pass through the area he was born in. But there's more on offer than wee Rabbie, with sunny stretches of spectacular beaches and world-famous golf courses. Offshore there's the delightful island of Arran that's everyone's favourite weekend spot, or if you've got less time head for the day-tripper's dream, Great Cumbrae.

Getting Around

Stagecoach Western (☎ 01292-613500) is the main operator on the mainland and on Arran, where **Western** (☎ 01770-302000) and **Royal Mail** (☎ 01463-256200) run buses around the island. Ferries to here and Great Cumbrae are run by **CalMac** (☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk).

LARGS

☎ 01475 / pop 11,241

This port town is enjoying a Viking-led recovery. Several shopfronts proclaim allegiance to the Norsemen, and there's the magnificent **Vikingar** (☎ 689777; Greenock Rd; adult/child £4.10/3.10; ⏲ 10.30am-5.30pm daily Apr-Sep, 10.30am-3.30pm daily Oct & Mar, 10.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Nov & Feb, closed Dec-Jan), which re-tells the story of the Vikings in Scotland and is excellent for littlies.

The **tourist office** (☎ 676182; Main St; ⏲ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Mar-Sep) is extremely helpful and books accommodation in town and also on Great Cumbrae.

CalMac ferries link Largs with Great Cumbrae (passenger/child/car return £3.65/1.83/15.35, 10 minutes, every 15 minutes). Largs has frequent bus and train connections to Glasgow.

ISLE OF GREAT CUMBRAE

☎ **01475 / pop 1430**

At only 4 miles long, the island of Great Cumbrae is only 'great' because it's bigger than the privately owned Little Cumbrae island (which is also called Wee Cumbrae). It's popular with cyclists who cruise the 10 miles of hilly roads trying to spot sculptures like the **Big Indian** scattered around the island.

Millport is the main town, with tempting sandy beaches (some brave souls even venture in for a swim). The town has two exceptional claims: **50 Stuart Street** is reputedly the world's narrowest house with a façade just 119cm across; and there's also Europe's smallest cathedral, the **Cathedral of the Isles** (☎ 530353; College St; admission free; ⏰ daily).

For a peek under the sea, **Robertson Museum & Aquarium** (☎ 530581; admission £1.50; ⏰ 10am-12.45pm & 2-4.45pm Mon-Fri, plus Sat Jun-Sep), on the edge of town towards the ferry pier, has a few interesting specimens.

There are some good accommodation options that can be booked in Largs (the tourist office can help), but the **College of the Holy Spirit** (☎ 530535; College St, Millport; d & tw £36) is the most divine. You stay in the verdant grounds of the cathedral and can peruse books at your leisure at the library.

For a decent bite, the **Dancing Midge** (☎ 531278; www.thedancingmidge.com; 24 Glasgow St, snacks £2-5; ⏰ 9am-4pm) does good coffee and paninis without stinging your wallet.

CalMac ferries link Great Cumbrae with Largs. Island buses meet the ferries for the short journey to Millport (adult/child £2.40/1.20). Several places in Millport hire out bikes, including **Mapes** (☎ 530444; 3 Guildford St; per hr £2; ⏰ daily).

AYR

☎ **01292 / pop 46,400**

Stretched along a long sandy beach, this buzzing township boomed as a seaside resort during the Victorian era. Elegant Georgian and Victorian buildings are a testament to its period as a leisure capital, as are nearby world championship golf courses, Turnberry and Troon. Today many visitors use the town as a jumping-off point for Burns territory, much of which lies within an hour's drive of Ayr.

Information

Carnegie Library (☎ 618492; 12 Main St; ⏰ 10am-7.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed & Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 678100; 12 Sandgate; info@ayrshire-arran.com; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights

As you'd expect in the capital of Burns Country, Rabbie is ubiquitous: he was baptised in the **Auld Kirk** (Old Church; ☎ 262938). In *The Brigs of Ayr* the town's bridges squabble about who will last longer. Near the bottom of High St, **Auld Brig** was built in 1491 and spans the river just down from the church. If you're over the poetry, the **beach** makes for a pleasant stroll.

Sleeping

Eglinton Guest House (☎ 264623; 23 Eglinton Tce; s/d from £20/38) This budget option may be getting longer in the tooth, but friendly staff and a location that's handy for beach and town ensure its popularity. Breakfast is negotiable if you want to save £5 off the room rates.

Richmond Guest House (☎ 265153; www.richmond-guest-house.co.uk; 38 Park Circus; s/d/f £30/50/68) In a posh pocket of town, this 170-year-old house manages to be friendly and cosy. Lofty ceilings and leather couches add to the sumptuous feel, but Brodie, the ever-affectionate chocolate Labrador, will help make you feel at home. This place effortlessly balances comfort and style.

Daviott House (☎ 269678; 12 Queens Tce; s/d/f £30/56/84) This cheery spot has several en suite rooms that can accommodate families. Great tailored breakfasts (including cold cuts and cheese if you're up for it first thing) and advice on local golf courses are good bonuses.

Numer 26 The Crescent (☎ 287329; 26 Bellevue Cres; www.26crescent.freeserve.co.uk; s/d £45/60-65) One of the more stately Victorian homes in the area actually manages a homy, lived-in feel, with great hospitality. Breakfasts, for example, run to porridge and haddock (not in the same dish!). The pricier double comes with a period four-poster bed, and sink-in baths are a luxury.

Other recommendations:

Heads of Ayr Caravan Park (☎ 442269; www.headsofayr.com; Dunure Rd; tent sites from £8) About 5 miles south of Ayr on the A719. Offers on-site vans as well as tent sites; and a modest bar.

Dunn Thing Guest House (☎ 284531; www.dunnthing.co.uk; 13 Park Circus; s/d £30/48) A good bet; does airport pick-up and a welcoming cuppa.

Eating & Drinking

Pandora (☎ 289919; 32 New Bridge St; light meals £2-4) The unimpressive shopfront belies a swish back room of dark-wood panelling and groovy orange chairs. Food is light but tasty with wraps, pizzas, cakes and bowls of healthy salad featuring prominently.

West Kirk (☎ 880416; 58a Sandgate; meals £4-6; ⏰ lunch & dinner) Okay, so it's a chain pub, but a dazzling one in a converted church that always has pews packed with drinkers and diners.

Tam o'Shanter (☎ 611684; 230 High St; mains £6-8) Claiming its name from Burns' most celebrated poem, this traditional pub hosts locals 'getting fou and unco happy' (as the poet said) on its ales and dining on its solid-if-simple grub.

Fouters (☎ 261391; 2a Academy St; mains £8-16; ⏰ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This place is the town's dining institution, stashed in a former bank vault in a side alley. The menu is where Ayrshire meets the Mediterranean with local produce whipped into tapas-style entrees or innovative pastas.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach Western runs the hourly express X77 service to Glasgow (£4.30, one hour) and Prestwick Airport (30 minutes). There are also services to Stranraer (£6.30, 1¾ hours, four to nine daily). There are frequent trains from Glasgow Central to Ayr (£5.70, 50 minutes, half-hourly) and some trains continue south to Stranraer (£11, 1½ hours from Ayr, seven daily).

AROUND AYR

Alloway

☎ **01292**

This pretty village on the southern outskirts of Ayr is the birthplace of Robbie Burns. Several sights have sprung up around the poet's home town all under the umbrella of **Burns National Heritage Park** (☎ 443700; www.burnsheritagepark.com; passport to all sites £5; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar).

Burns Cottage & Museum (admission £4) stands by the main road from Ayr and is one of the more authentic sights. The poet lived the first seven years of his life in this cramped thatched cottage, which includes a suitably musty byre and a warm storytelling hearth. The nearby museum of Burnsiana exhibits some fabulous artwork as well as many of his songs and letters, and the small surrounding garden is impressive.

Close by is crumbling **Alloway Auld Kirk**, an eerie setting for the witches' dance in *Tam o'Shanter*. Burns' father, William Burnes (his son dropped the 'e'), is buried in the kirkyard.

ROBERT BURNS

Best remembered for penning *Auld Lang Syne*, Robert Burns (1759–96) is Scotland's most famous poet, and a popular hero whose birthday (25 January) is celebrated as **Burns Night** by Scots around the world.

Born in 1759 in Alloway, Burns came from a poor family but was sent to a local school where he showed a talent for literature and folk songs. He began to write his own songs and satires, some of which he distributed privately. When farm life grew difficult and he was threatened with prosecution by the father of one of his romantic misadventures, Burns decided to emigrate to Jamaica and published his poems to raise money for the journey.

The poems did so well that Burns decided to remain in Scotland and devote himself to writing. He moved to Edinburgh in 1787 and published a 2nd edition, but he was poorly paid and had to take a job as a customs officer in Dumfriesshire. He contributed many songs to collections and a 3rd edition of his poems was published in 1793. Burns composed more than 28,000 lines of verse over 22 years. He died in Dumfries in 1796, aged 37, after a heart attack. He had eventually married Jean Armour (of the litigious father), with whom he had nine children; she even took in a couple of his illegitimate ones, famously sighing 'Our Robbie should have had twa wives'.

Burns wrote in Lallans, a language also know as Lowland Scots, that's not very accessible to some English speakers, which may be why Scots still hold Rabbie so dear.

Tam o' Shanter Experience (admission £2) is an elaborate audiovisual retelling of the famous poem; it may beguile children while adults might miss the magic.

Alloway is 3 miles south of Ayr. Stagecoach Western bus 57 runs (hourly 8.45am to 6pm Monday to Saturday) between Alloway and Ayr.

Electric Brae

On the A719 (9 miles south of Ayr), a spooky stretch of road named the Electric Brae is known as the spot where cars appear to roll uphill. Early speculations of magnets and faerie folk are untrue, as the slope just appears to go in one direction but actually subtly tilts in the other, creating this odd illusion. In summer locals waggishly label the natural phenomenon 'Out of Order'.

Culzean Castle

As you approach the magnificent **Culzean** (☎ 01655-884455; www.culzeanexperience.org; admission park & castle £12, park only £6; 🕑 castle 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, park 9.30am-sunset year-round; ♿), pronounced cul-lane, you'll get the sense that the majestic castle is shimmering like a mirage. Of course this is because the entrance is built on a converted viaduct, but it instils the castle's mystery and magic to every visitor.

This impressive 18th-century edifice was designed to perch romantically on the cliffs by influential architect Robert Adam, whose aesthetic embellishes almost every aspect of the castle. The **Blue Drawing Room** showcases Adam's love of details, such as the elaborate chimney frieze of gryphons which caper over the doorways. The **Oval Staircase** provides the centrepiece of the house, serving as characteristic Adam invention and flair. The **Armoury** is second only to Windsor Castle for its collection of flintlock pistols, swords and other weaponry.

The top-floor apartment is known as the Eisenhower Suite and was given to the American general at the end of WWII to salute his role in that conflict. Today this suite is one of many options for staying in the grand surrounds of the castle (singles/doubles/suites from £140/235/250).

The surrounding grounds include a fascinating woodland that hosts deer and birdlife as well as a rugged strip of beach.

Culzean is accessible by bus 58 or 60 from Ayr (30 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Saturday), which pass the park gates, from where it's a 20-minute walk through the grounds to the castle.

ARDROSSAN

☎ 01294 / pop 11,000

This port town is a hub for buses, trains and ferries on to Arran, but unless you're keen to see a church converted into a pound store there's little reason to stop here. Trains leave Glasgow Central (55 minutes, five daily) to connect with ferries to the Isle of Arran; see p820. Stagecoach's X15 bus runs express from Glasgow (1½ hours, twice daily) and also meets ferries.

ISLE OF ARRAN

☎ 01770 / pop 5060

While international visitors head north for the more remote islands, British people look to this island for their perfect weekender. The combination of gourmet grub and the truly great outdoors makes for a good mini-break no matter what you're after. You'll see novice cyclists enjoying summer sun as they wobble along the manageable trail that loops the island, while walkers head further inland to tackle more challenging hills. Then there are country pubs where the fire is as warm as the banter. The brochures call it Scotland in miniature, but most visitors leave thinking of it as Scotland with the crap bits cut out.

Orientation

The Ardrossan ferry docks at Brodick, the island's main town. A road circumnavigates the island, with a few roads cutting across the hilly interior. South of Brodick, Lamlash is the actual capital and, like Whiting Bay further south, a popular seaside resort. In the north Lochranza is a sweet village that has a non-winter ferry to Claonaig on the Kintyre peninsula.

Information

Brodick has two banks with ATMs, car- and bike-hire facilities, and two co-op supermarkets, where you can access the internet. Other places to get online include the Kildonan Hotel (p819) and Catacol Hotel (p818).

Arran Library (☎ 302835; Brodick Hall; 🕑 10am-7.30pm Tue & Thu-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 303774; 🕑 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7.30pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat Oct-May) Near Brodick pier; gets swarmed with visitors when the ferry comes in.

Your Computer Shop (☎ 303808; Brodick; per hr £1) Another spot to get online.

Sights

BRODICK & AROUND

The island's biggest town, Brodick, has the major ferry terminal and a delightful long curving bay which makes for a pleasant stroll.

Just north of town, **Brodick Castle** (NTS; ☎ 302202; castle & gardens adult/child £10/7, garden only adult/child £5/4; 🕑 castle 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, gardens 10am-sunset year-round) is a still-inhabited castle known for its trophy room lined with deer heads and its impressive formal dining room. While access to the interior is disappointingly limited, the grounds are worth the entry fee for their walled garden and nature centre, which includes owl-watching.

THE NORTH

The road north weaves between dramatic mountains and the coast, which has been known as a habitat for seals. The sweet township of **Lochranza**, in a small bay at the north of the island, has its own 13th-century **Lochranza Castle** (HS; admission free) that creeps into everyone's photos (if it's closed, ask at the SYHA Hostel for the keyholder). The township itself is so quiet that deer graze in the streets.

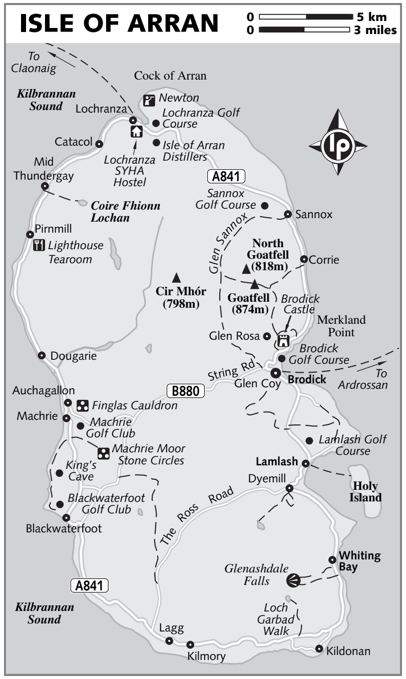
Just south of town, **Isle of Arran Distillers** (☎ 830264; www.arranwhisky.com; tours adult/child £3.50/free; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, reduced hours at other times, tours on the hour) only recently produced its first 10-year-old whisky to great acclaim; you can try it on the tour that also lets you pour your own bottle and write your own label.

THE SOUTH

North of Whiting Bay is **Lamlash,** in a bayside setting, stretched along a pretty beachfront. Across the bay, **Holy Island** is owned by Tibetan Buddhists whose **Centre for World Peace & Health** (☎ 013873-73232; www.holyisland.org) runs retreats and encourages day-visits to wander in the woods. Check out the lighthouse and contemplate peace, man. A **ferry** (☎ 07932 786524; adult/child return £9/5) will take you to this tranquil spot (six daily from May to September). Tickets are sold from a pierside caravan.

On the island's western side the **Machrie Moor Stone Circles** are six rings of stone circles dating from the 2nd millennium BC. The drive or cycle around this side of the island is scenic, though the roads narrow to single lanes at some points.

In the southern part of the island the road drops into little wooded valleys, and it's particularly lovely around **Lagg**. At **Kildonan** there are a string of rocky beaches and the ruins of an ivy-clad castle.



Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

Walking up **Goatfell**, Arran's highest peak, takes up to eight hours return, starting and finishing in Brodick. With clear weather the summit gives views of Ben Lomond and Northern Ireland's coast. It can, however, be very cold and windy. Make sure you have the appropriate maps (available at the tourist office), waterproof gear and a compass.

The perfect way to take in the whole island is to stroll the low-level **Coastal Way** (www.coastalway.co.uk), a multiday walk that kicks off in Brodick on a 60-mile loop that passes through most of the villages and up to Goatfell.

Explore the Forests of the Isle of Arran is good leaflet that details seven walks on Arran and is available free at the tourist office.

For cyclists, the 50-mile coastal road has few serious hills – more in the south than the north. For details of bike-rental places, see Getting Around (p820).

A COTTAGE SOMEWHERE

There are plenty of self-catering places in Lamlash, many bookable through **Arran HideAways** (☎ 302303; www.arran–hideaways.co.uk).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

For all kinds of outdoor fun, **Arran Adventures** (☎ 302244; www.arranadventure.com; 1hr kayak hire £10, activities 1/4hr £15/45, boats trips from £15) offers speedboat trips to Holy Island and around Brodick Bay as well as activities from abseiling to power-kiting to sea kayaking; or take on the waves solo with kayak hire.

The rugged inland can also make for some good horse trekking. A good local outfit is **North Sannox Pony Trekking** (☎ 810222; Sannox; 1/2hr treks £15/28), which explores the scenic north; to get here turn right off the A841.

Arran's geography creates some unique golf courses from the hilly Whiting Bay to 12 holes at Shiskine (near Blackwaterfoot). You can sample them all with the **Arran Golf Pass** (£90) available from **MacAlpine Hotel** (☎ 302155; Brodick) and tourist offices. The pass lasts for a year so you can keep coming back to tackle the tricky holes. Alternatively you can grab a bucket of balls at the **Arran Driving Range** (☎ 860530; Balmichael; 50 balls £2.50) and whack away for an hour or two.

For littlies, Brodick Castle has a basic **adventure playground** that includes a wee flying fox.

Sleeping

Weekends book up quickly, so plan ahead if you're looking to stay awhile. Budget accommodation is particularly scarce.

BRODICK

Midrange

Close to the ferry and close to facilities, Brodick is an easy choice for accommodation, but other villages give more of a feel for the island.

Dunvegan Guest House (☎ 302811; Brodick; s/d £35/66) This small homey place features pleasant gardens and has a near-pier location perfect for an early ferry. Fans of TV's *Emmerdale* may recognise that it was used as a location for the show.

Glencloy Farm Guesthouse (☎ 302351; Glencloy Rd; s/d £45/60, with shared bathroom £35/50) This farmhouse is perfect for families, with healthy breakfasts, plenty of animals for kids to pet and videos for those cabin-fever rainy days. And because it's family-owned, you'll feel like you've been welcomed into the clan by the end of your stay.

Invercloy (☎ 302225; Brodick; d £70-90) Most rooms in this well-appointed guesthouse include en suites. As well, deluxe top-storey rooms include four-poster beds and small balconies with views across to Brodick Castle and Goatfell. There's also a great lower-storey room if you miss out on the upper-storey glory.

Top End

Kilmichael Country House Hotel (☎ 302219; www.kilmichael.com; Glen Cloy; s £95, d £150-190) With a delightful *Passage to India* feel, this former King's Coroner's house has been royally refurbished into the island's best boutique hotel. Best of all are the modern features such as an iPod shuffling through laid-back lounge music in the dining room as well as Asian art from the owner's travels around the globe. Cottages out the back are perfect for get-away-from-it-all couples and include a double Jacuzzi.

LOCHRANZA

Budget

Lochranza Golf, Caravan & Camping (☎ 830273; Lochranza; tent sites £6; 🕒 Apr-Oct) An idyllic spot near the golf course, which boasts great views.

Lochranza SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1140; www.syha.org.uk; dm £12; 🕒 Mar-Oct) With superfriendly staff and a relaxed location, this spot is tough to beat. The owner has plenty of tips on local walks and cycling, while the building itself is spacious enough to take in larger groups without overrunning solo travellers.

Midrange

Castlekirk (☎ 830202; r per person from £25; 🕒 Mar-Nov) This converted 19th-century church offers divine B&B along with a quirky collection of Scottish art that includes a rather eerie carved eagle.

Catacol Hotel (☎ 830231; Catacol; r per person £25; 💻) This old-style pub is set in a scenic out-of-the-way spot on the west coast, yet somehow manages to be less than 2 miles from Lochranza. It does affordable B&B, with the bonus of free internet.

Apple Lodge (☎/fax 830229; d & tw £66) This boutique B&B is set just off the bay with unique rooms and enthusiastic hosts. Ask for the four-poster bed for a romantic weekend.

Lochranza Hotel (☎/fax 830223; www.lochranza.co.uk; s/d £50/90) One of the friendliest spots on the island and a real hub of the village. Rooms here are comfortable enough, though a few have a garish pink colour scheme. There are brilliant views of the bay from the front rooms. Head downstairs for periodic folk sessions.

KILDONAN & WHITING BAY

Budget

Seal Shore Camping (☎ 820320; Kildonan; per person £6, plus per tent £1) Well-located for the Kildonan Hotel and with loads of extras including a pool table and laundry, this is one of the more comfortable camping options. Dig those pegs deep though, as this seaside spot can be exposed to winds.

Eden Lodge (☎ 700357; Whiting Bay; d £50-70) With plush doubles and some good views over the sea, this new hotel makes a modish weekender for couples. If you can, grab the purple room for the best views and minimalist chic.

Midrange

Mingulay B&B (☎ 700346; www.arranwelcome.com; Whiting Bay; s/d £30/54) This charming spot welcomes you with a cream tea and a chat with the owner and other guests; expect your national flag stuck in a scone! Good-sized rooms and sea aspects make it a top spot. Parking skills will be tested with the narrow drive.

Top End

Kildonan Hotel (☎ 820207; www.kildonanhotel.com; d from £75; 💻) Overlooking rocks where seals regularly bask, this hotel has been refurbished in sleek style. Expect seaside views, even from the hip bar and beer garden out the front. Comfortable beds and an excellent restaurant menu complete the package.

Eating

Kildonan Hotel (☎ 820207; Kildonan; mains £6-8; 🕒 noon-9pm; 💻) This hip spot has been stylishly decorated in smooth modern curves and polished floorboards. Expect hefty bar portions and a more refined menu in the restaurant that overlooks the seals basking on the rocks.

Lochranza Hotel (☎ 830223; Lochranza; mains £6-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Despite being the only place in town for an evening meal, this little pub keeps it cheerful and serves up hearty Scottish pub grub, plus it has a good range of beers and malts for post-prandial sampling.

Joshua's (☎ 700308; Shore Rd, Whiting Bay; mains £8.50-12; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) This big beachside spot is quirky, from the giant bear that greets you to the table decorations of twirled bamboo and the lipstick-red chairs. Nab a spot in the conservatory to watch the tide come and go as you enjoy a coffee, or retreat to the dining room for pasta and risotto.

Broderick Bar Brasserie (☎ 302169; Brodick; mains £12-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner) You can tell this is the swish new spot, because they've lacquered the driftwood in the loungey dining area. The menu is innovative: smoked salmon and

PACKING AN ARRAN PICNIC BASKET

Over the last decade, many Scottish islands have established themselves as gourmet brands as much as landmasses. From Stornoway black pudding to Valhalla Breweries, it seems like every island is offering signature ingredients to fancy menus across Scotland.

Arran is no exception, and while you're here you should try to sample some of the local nosh. For more information see www.tastetrail.com. Here are a few of our favourites, though we're sure you can find even more of your own to take on a long walk or cycle:

Arran Brewery (☎ 302353; www.arranbrewery.co.uk; Brodick; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 12.30-5pm Sun Mar-Sep) A chatty owner does tasting tours (£2) that usually conclude with a purchase of the local brew; Arran Sunset quenches best after a day of walking.

Arran Fine Food Kitchen Shop (☎ 600606; Old Mill, Lamlash; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Mar-late Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat late Oct-Feb) Does fine mustards, chutneys and other flavoursome preserves; grab Robbie Burns marmalade with a dram of whisky for a breakfast cure for post-holiday Mondayitis.

Creelers (☎ 302810; Duchess Ct, Brodick; mains £12-17; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) The Smokehouse, attached to the famous restaurant, is ideal for sampling top seafood like salmon pâté or take-home cullen skink.

Island Cheese Company (☎ 302788; www.islandcheese.co.uk; Brodick; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Tastings run all day at the counter, and for an unpretentious nibble grab a cheddar shot through with herbs or chilli.

Wooley's of Arran (☎ 302280; Brodick; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) A traditional bakery that makes the oatcakes that are eaten across the island.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lighthouse Tearoom (☎ 850240; Pirnmill; mains £6-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A picturesque drive south of Lochranza, this is one of those spots you'll be surprised to find in such a remote location. Meals are straight-up grub, with good menu staples including steak pies and pâté with oatcakes, but the view is magnificent. The gimmickly maritime décor stops just short of shivering your timbers, and the desserts are worth holding out for.

prawn cheesecake, venison with blackcurrants on red cabbage. Definitely the hot-date spot on the island.

Creelers (☎ 302810; Duchess Ct; mains £12-17; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Fish fetishists get giggly at the mere mention of this seafood restaurant near Brodick Castle. Its secret is fresh seafood and shellfish, much of which comes from around Arran and which can be bought at the Smokehouse next door.

Other recommendations:

Eagle's Nest Restaurant (☎ 830264; Isle of Arran Distillery, Lochranza; mains £8-13; 🕑 10am-5pm) Set upstairs at the distillery, this restaurant specialises in local produce and seafood.

Ormidale Hotel (☎ 302100; Brodick; 🕑 dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sat & Sun) With a good beer garden and promising pub grub, this is a good spot for a sunny afternoon.

Getting There & Away

CalMac (☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk) runs daily car ferries between Ardrossan and Brodick (per person/car return £8.55/52, 55 minutes, four to six daily). It also runs a summer-only service between Claonaig on the Kintyre peninsula and Lochranza from late March to late October (per person/car return £7.70/35, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily).

Getting Around

Frequent buses loop from Brodick to Blackwaterfoot, some anticlockwise around the island via Corrie and Lochranza (45 minutes, four to six daily) and some clockwise via Lamlash and Whiting Bay (30 minutes, four to 12 daily). An Arran Rural Rover gives a day's travel on buses for £4 (buy on board).

Alternatively, there's car hire from £25 per day from outfits like **Arran Transport** (☎ 302121; ukfilter@lineone.net; Brodick) or **Whiting Bay Garage** (☎ 07967 587481).

Brodick has several bike-hire operators, including **Brodick Cycle Hire** (☎ 302868; Brodick boathouse; per day £11) and **Arran Adventures** (☎ 302244; www.arranadventure.com; 3hr-hire £8)

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Highlands & Northern Islands

Scotland's extremities encourage superlatives; from Britain's deepest lake (Loch Ness) to its highest peak (Ben Nevis), and all the way out to the Shetlands where they're not even sure if they're part of Scotland or Britain. There's a rich history of bloody battles on heather-softened moors and defence of now-crumbling castles, while Viking ruins hark back to another history preserved by the isolation of the outer islands. Buried even deeper in the past are the mystical standing stones that lift megalithic profiles across the Hebrides and Orkneys, their meaning blurred by time. And then there are the stories of prehistoric monsters puddling around in the lochs…

It's not all spooky though, with gutsy Fort William earning the title of UK's Outdoor Capital for its exciting walks, challenging skiing and burgeoning mountain-biking scene. Then there's the surprise of golden-sand beaches on remote Harris, and of watching the playful stumblings of puffins on a sheer cliff turn suddenly into flight. The absence of humans has meant that the isolated areas thrive with seals and whales, and birds you've never seen before.

Speaking of rare specimens, there are the locals; tougher than their shaggy highland cows and best encountered by the warm hearth of a highland pub. Folk might start with a chat as they warm their hands, but by the end of the night they'll be buying you a dram for the road if they're not inviting you for a lock-in.

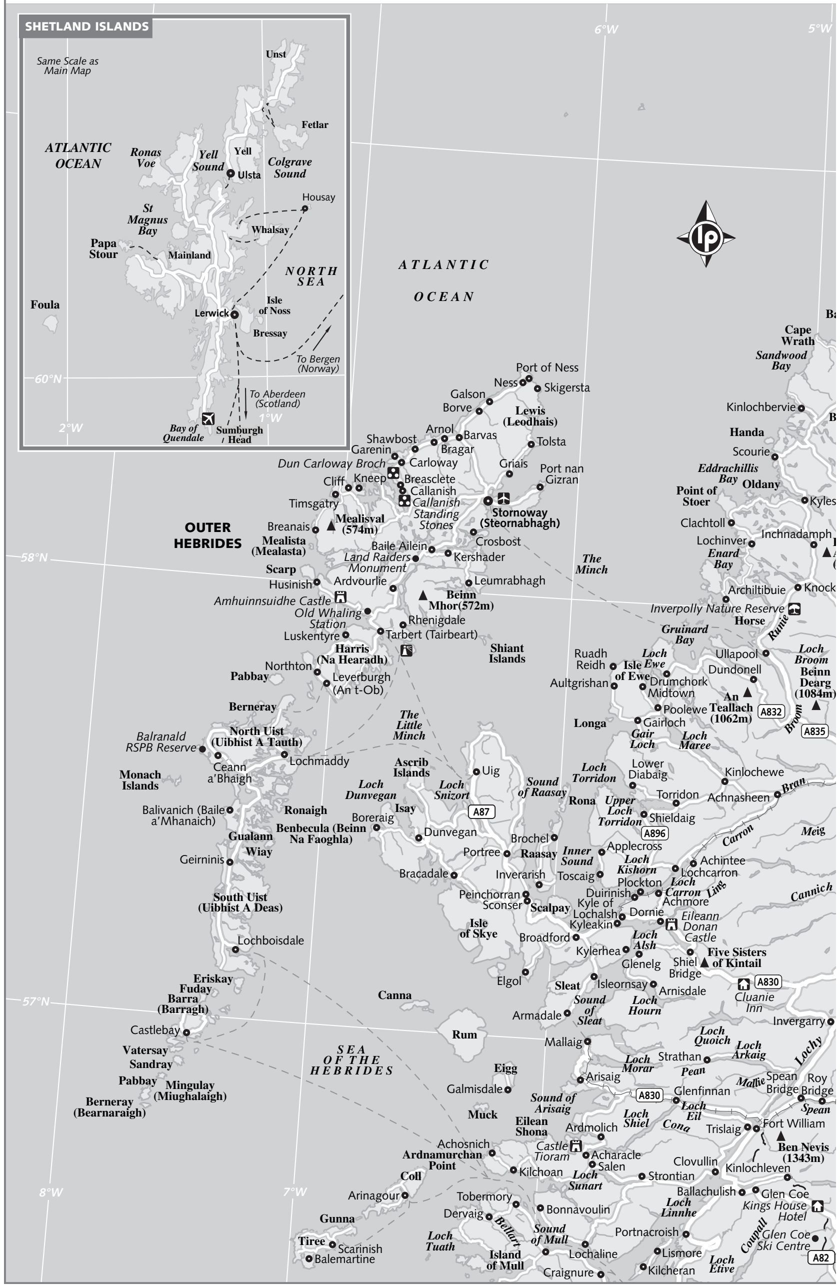
HIGHLIGHTS

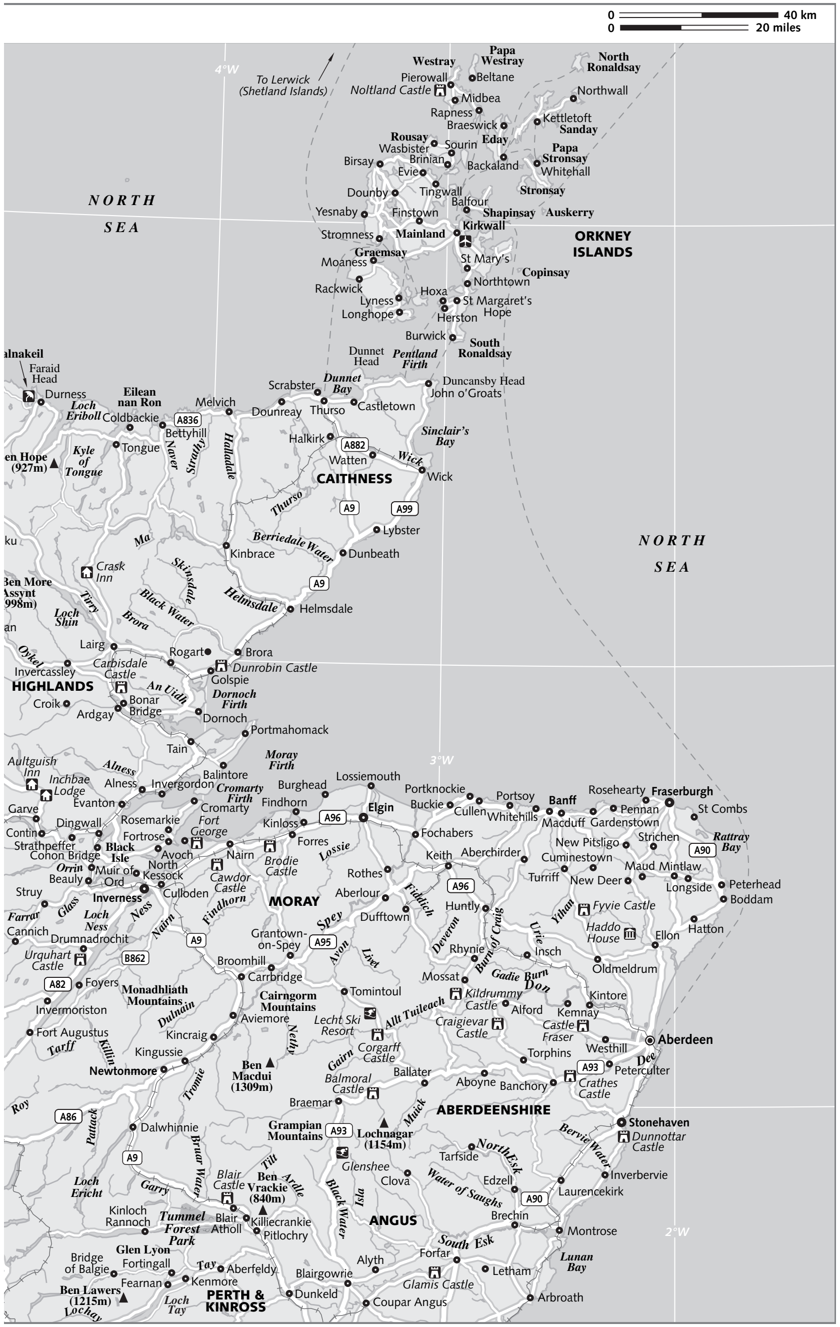
- Playing with puffins in Britain's extreme north at **Hermaness** (p939)
- Getting in touch with your inner Viking at **Mousa Broch** (p938) or **Skara Brae** (p927)
- Admiring the view of the rugged **Cuillin Hills** (p910) from the serene island of **Raasay** (p912)
- Taking on Britain's highest mountain with a climb at **Ben Nevis** (p885)
- Treading the boards as thane-for-a-day on the set of the Scottish play at **Cawdor Castle** (p894)
- Stepping back in time in Kirkwall's magnificent **St Magnus Cathedral** (p921)

Hermaness
Mousa Broch
Skara Brae
Kirkwall
Raasay
Cuillin Hills
Cawdor
Ben Nevis

- POPULATION: 276,649
- AREA: 12,041 SQ MILES

HIGHLANDS & NORTHERN ISLANDS


SHETLAND ISLANDS
Same Scale as Main Map
Unst
Fetlar
Yell
Ulsta
Yell Sound
Ronas Voe
Colgrave Sound
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Housay
St Magnus Bay
Whalsay
Papa Stour
Mainland
NORTH SEA
Foula
Lerwick
Isle of Noss
Bressay
To Bergen (Norway)
To Aberdeen (Scotland)
Bay of Quendale
Sumburgh Head
ATLANTIC OCEAN
The Minch
OUTER HEBRIDES
Port of Ness
Ness
Skigersta
Galson
Borve
Lewis (Leodhais)
Tolsta
Shawbost
Garenin
Arnol
Barvas
Bragar
Carloway
Dun Carloway Broch
Callanish
Callanish Standing Stones
Stornoway (Steornabhagh)
Mealisval (574m)
Harris (Na Hearadh)
Tarbert (Tairbeart)
Leverburgh (An t-Ob)
Shiant Islands
Berneray
North Uist (Uibhist A Tuath)
Lochmaddy
Balranald RSPB Reserve
Monach Islands
Benbecula (Beinn Na Faoghla)
Balivanich (Baile a'Mhanaich)
South Uist (Uibhist A Deas)
Lochboisdale
Eriskay
Barra (Barraigh)
Castlebay
Vatersay
Sandray
Pabbay
Mingulay (Miughalaigh)
Berneray (Bearnaraigh)
SEA OF THE HEBRIDES
Canna
Rum
Eigg
Muck
Coll
Tiree
Gunna
Isle of Skye
Uig
Dunvegan
Portree
Raasay
Broadford
Kyleakin
Sleat
Armadale
Mallaig
Arisaig
Ardnamurchan Point
Tobermory
Island of Mull
Craignure
Cape Wrath
Sandwood Bay
Kinlochbervie
Handa
Scourie
Point of Stoer
Lochinver
Inverpolly Nature Reserve
Ullapool
An Teallach (1062m)
Poolewe
Gairloch
Loch Maree
Kinlochewe
Torridon
Shieldaig
Applecross
Lochcarron
Plockton
Kyle of Lochalsh
Dornie
Eilean Donan Castle
Five Sisters of Kintail
Glenelg
Invergarry
Glenfinnan
Fort William
Ben Nevis (1343m)
Strontian
Kilchoan
Ballachulish
Glen Coe
Kinlochleven
Loch Linnhe
Lismore
6°W
5°W
8°W
7°W
58°N
57°N


0 40 km
0 20 miles
To Lerwick (Shetland Islands)
NORTH SEA
Westray
Papa Westray
Pierowall
Noltland Castle
North Ronaldsay
Sanday
Eday
Stronsay
Rousay
Birsay
Mainland
Stromness
Kirkwall
Shapinsay
ORKNEY ISLANDS
St Margaret's Hope
South Ronaldsay
Burwick
Pentland Firth
Dunnet Head
Duncansby Head
John o'Groats
Thurso
Scrabster
Castletown
Wick
CAITHNESS
Lybster
Dunbeath
Helmsdale
Brora
Dunrobin Castle
Golspie
Dornoch
Dornoch Firth
Tain
Portmahomack
HIGHLANDS
Durness
Tongue
Bettyhill
Melvich
Ben Hope (927m)
Lairg
Bonar Bridge
Invergordon
Cromarty
Moray Firth
Lossiemouth
Elgin
Forres
Nairn
Inverness
Culloden
Loch Ness
Drumnadrochit
Urquhart Castle
Fort Augustus
MORAY
Banff
Fraserburgh
Peterhead
Buckie
Huntly
Keith
Dufftown
Grantown-on-Spey
Aviemore
Cairngorm Mountains
Kingussie
Newtonmore
Ben Macdui (1309m)
Braemar
Balmoral Castle
Ballater
Banchory
ABERDEENSHIRE
Aberdeen
Stonehaven
Dunnottar Castle
Lochnagar (1154m)
Grampian Mountains
Blair Atholl
Pitlochry
Killiecrankie
ANGUS
Montrose
Arbroath
Forfar
Glamis Castle
PERTH & KINROSS
Aberfeldy
Dunkeld
Ben Lawers (1215m)
Loch Tay
4°W
3°W
2°W

Activities

For outdoor-lovers, especially walkers, the Highlands are heaven. For general information, see p83, and there are suggestions for shorter routes given throughout this chapter. Regional tourist offices stock free leaflets, plus maps and guides covering walking, cycling and other activities.

CYCLING

While you're winding through glorious scenery, often with light traffic, you'll think the Highlands have been designed for cyclists – although distances between towns can be long. The northern section of the 214-mile **Lochs & Glens Cycle Way** starts in Glasgow and winds its way through the heart of the region via Loch Ness and Pitlochry, ending in Inverness. The **Aberdeen to John o'Groats Cycle Route** leads inland across the Aberdeenshire Peninsula, via Inverness, before aiming north for the extreme northeast point on the British mainland, and continuing on through Orkney and Shetland as well. On the other side of the region, if you set aside a couple of weeks and have fair weather, one of the most rewarding (and possibly hardest) rides available follows the stunning roads of the west coast through Kyle of Lochalsh, Kinlochewe, Gairloch, Ullapool and Inchnadamph – and possibly all the way to Cape Wrath.

And then there are the islands – Skye is the most easily reached island in this region. If you want to go even further, ferries from Skye sail to the Outer Hebrides, where an end-to-end tour of this island chain is a popular cycling option. The only disadvantage with heading this way is that you may often be facing the wind (it usually comes from the southwest, and has the whole of the Atlantic to get up speed), so doing this tour in reverse is another option, sailing from Oban to Barra or South Uist, heading 10 miles north to Harris and Lewis, and then going by ferry back to Skye and the mainland. There are bike-rental outfits on Skye, Lewis, Barra and South Uist. **Sustrans** (www.sustrans.co.uk) have maps of National Cycling Networks.

Two good outfits that can get you cycling are **Wild Adventures** (☎ 851 374; www.wild-adventures.co.uk), which goes to Glen Coe, Ben Nevis, the Cairngorms, Orkney and the Hebridean Islands, and **Cycle Wild Scotland** (☎ 810676; www.cyclewildscotland.co.uk), which does guided tours and courses for mountain and downhill biking.

WALKING

Long-distance walking possibilities in this region include the **Great Glen Way**, a 70-mile jaunt from Fort William to Inverness along the Great Glen, and the **West Highland Way**, which runs for 95 miles from Fort William to Milngavie, 8 miles north of Glasgow. If you don't want to go the whole distance, Glen Coe (21 miles) makes a good place to aim for – and it's a fine area in its own right for mountain walking. A more leisurely, and very beautiful, route is the 84-mile Speyside Way (p824), which follows one of Scotland's best-loved rivers from the Cairngorm foothills to the coast.

Walk Scotland (www.walkscotland.com) produces several good walk leaflets and a comprehensive website that can get you planning.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Other activities in the Highlands and northern islands of Scotland include **scuba diving**, notably at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys (p925); **rock climbing** and **mountaineering**, most famously on and around Ben Nevis; and **fishing**, both in rivers and the sea. The main areas for **skiing** and **snowboarding** are the Cairngorms (p880), Glen Coe (p888), and the Nevis Range (p885) near Fort William.

Getting Around

If you don't have wheels, make your first priority grabbing a free copy of *The Highlands, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles Public Transport Map* from a tourist office. It's a valuable resource.

BOAT

Ferries connect the mainland with the islands off the west and north coasts. **Caledonian MacBrayne** (CalMac; ☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk) is the main operator off the west coast. If you're travelling by car in summer, it's wise to book a few days in advance. For ferries to Orkney and Shetland, see p921 and p935, respectively.

BUS

Wick, Thurso, Ullapool and Kyle of Lochalsh can all be reached by **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) bus from Inverness, or from Edinburgh and Glasgow via Inverness or Fort William. Another major operator on local routes is **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.co.uk). The **Royal Mail Postbus** (☎ 0845 774 0740; www.postbus.royalmail.com) serves many remote communities.

There are several bus services specifically aimed at backpackers; see Transport (p969) for details.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you want to explore some of the more remote areas you should consider hiring a car; it will significantly increase your flexibility and independence. Roads are single track in many areas, so duck into passing places when you spot oncoming traffic. Plan ahead, as petrol stations can be few and far between. Rental-car outlets are listed under towns throughout this chapter, but it's worth considering renting a car from Edinburgh or Glasgow as it works out a bit cheaper. Taking cars on ferries to the islands can be expensive; on the further-flung islands it can work out cheaper to hire a car for a couple of days once you get there.

TRAIN

The two Highland railway lines from Inverness – north along the east coast to Wick and Thurso, and west to Kyle of Lochalsh – are justly famous. The West Highland line also follows a spectacular route from Glasgow to Fort William and Mallaig (for the Isle of Skye and the Small Isles).

ScotRail's Highland Rover ticket gives four days of unlimited travel to be used within eight days (£59) on the lines from Inverness to Wick and Thurso, Kyle of Lochalsh, Aberdeen and Aviemore; and on the West Highland line between Glasgow, Oban, Fort William and Mallaig; inquire about local ferry and bus travel also included in the ticket.

For rail information, you can call the **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) or check ScotRail's website at www.scotrail.co.uk.

THE CAIRNGORMS

Britain's second-highest mountain range still elicits gasps as you approach through forests of Caledonian pine. The broad valley is sliced in two by the sparkling River Spey and is famous for whisky. The country around here gets different crowds throughout the year: walkers and bird-watchers pace the forest paths in spring and summer, hoping for a glimpse of the rare capercaillie or osprey, while in winter Britain's largest ski resort attracts powderhounds from across the country.

AVIEMORE

☎ 01479 / pop 2397

Aviemore is decked out to look like a ski village that could be anywhere in the world (there's something not quite right about faux-chalet chic in the middle of Scotland). Despite the town's odd architecture, the surrounding landscape has enough natural beauty to impress. Aviemore is the jumping-off point for the Cairngorms, a mecca for skiers, walkers and lovers of the truly great outdoors.

Orientation & Information

Aviemore is just off the A9 bypass. Grampian Rd is the main street with banks, eateries and the train station, while Dalfaber runs parallel. Eight miles southeast are the Cairngorms, on Ski Rd (B970/A951).

The **tourist office** (☎ 810363; aviemoretic@host.co.uk; The Mall, Grampian Rd; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) has a bureau de change and sells many Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of the area, and books on walking in the Cairngorms.

There's a cluster of ATMs just outside Tesco supermarket on Grampian Rd. Many outdoor equipment shops along Grampian Rd organise gear hire and ski lessons. Try **Ellis Brigham** (☎ 810175; 9 Grampian Rd), near the train station. To get online, the cheapest of several places is the **Old Bridge Hotel** (Dalfaber Rd; per hr £2), on the other side of the tracks.

Activities

WALKING

Don't be fooled by the beauty of the Cairngorms; they're just as tough as many other Scottish mountains. A moderate steep half-day hike (4½ hours return) can take you to the summit of **Cairngorm** (1245m) from the car park at the end of the Ski Rd. More advanced walkers continue south to **Ben Macdui** (1309m – Britain's second-highest peak), but this takes eight to 10 hours from the car park, and it's a serious walk.

A more sedate, and extremely beautiful walk, the **Speyside Way** is a waymarked trail that meanders along the River Spey from Aviemore to the coast at Spey Bay, passing through whisky country and running along a former railway line.

Another trail leads west from Aviemore Youth Hostel and passes under the A9 into the **Craigellachie Nature Reserve**, a great place for short hikes traversing steep hills, with plenty of wildlife spotting.

The **Lairig Ghru trail**, which can take up to eight hours, is a demanding 24-mile route from Aviemore over the Lairig Ghru Pass to Braemar. If you're not doing the full route, it's still worth hiking the six-hour return trip up to the pass.

With Scotland's notoriously changeable weather, you should always prepare for all conditions: bring plenty of sustenance and liquids, as well as a good map, a compass and waterproof jacket. Always ask about conditions before heading out. In winter these walks are not to be attempted without serious equipment and experience of snowy conditions.

SKIING

With 19 runs, **Cairngorm Mountain** (☎ 861261; www.cairngormmountain.com; day pass adult/child £26/16) is Britain's largest ski area. Snow is notoriously unreliable, but when there's a good fall and the sun's out, there's good skiing. The season runs from December until the snow melts, which can be at the end of April.

The ski area is about 9 miles southeast of Aviemore. Ski tows and the Cairngorm Mountain Railway funicular start from the main Coire Cas car park, and are connected to the more distant Coire na Ciste car park by free shuttle bus. Several places along Aviemore's main street hire out gear.

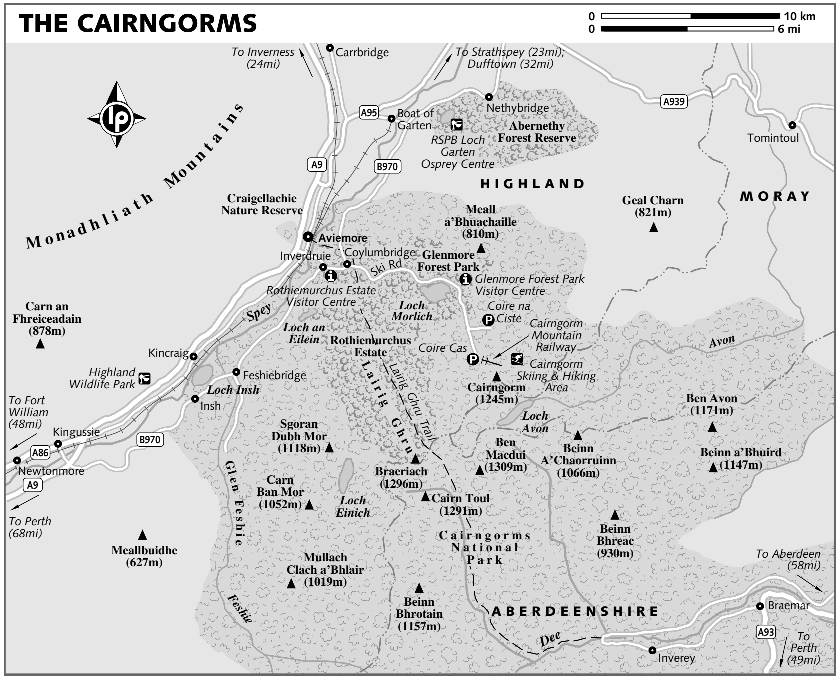
For tips on hitting the white stuff try the following instructors: **School of Snowsports** (☎ 812335; www.schoolofsnowsports.co.uk; 1-/2-day lesson from £35) which hires out gear, and **Ski School** (☎ 861319; www.theskischool.co.uk; 1-day lesson from £66) which offers snowboard lessons.

FISHING

Fishing is wildly popular around these parts, with salmon, sea trout and brown trout in abundance. The tourist office has information on permits for the River Spey and various local lochs. Shops such as **Speyside Sports** (☎ 810656; 1 Station Sq) sell fishing permits (local rivers/lochs £25/15). A less demanding option, the **Rothiemurchus Fishery** (☎ 810703; Rothiemurchus Estate; 1-day rod hire £12-45, 1hr tuition £300) has stocked lochs that almost guarantee a bite.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Glenmore Lodge (☎ 861256; www.glenmorelodge.co.uk; Loch Morlich; 2-day courses from £120) is an impressive centre for training courses in almost any snow-, rock- or water-based activity you care to name. It offers a level of professionalism many outfits only dream of; most courses last three to five days, although there are some one-day sessions. The lodge offers excellent accommodation (see right).


THE CAIRNGORMS
0 10 km
0 6 mi
To Inverness (24mi)
Carrbridge
To Strathspey (23mi); Dufftown (32mi)
A95
Boat of Garten
RSPB Loch Garten Osprey Centre
Nethybridge
Abernethy Forest Reserve
A939
Tomintoul
A9
B970
Monadhliath Mountains
HIGHLAND
MORAY
Craigellachie Nature Reserve
Meall a'Bhuachaille (810m)
Geal Charn (821m)
Aviemore
Inverdruie
Coylumbridge
Ski Rd
Glenmore Forest Park
Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre
Rothiemurchus Estate Visitor Centre
Loch Morlich
Coire na Ciste
Carn an Fhreiceadain (878m)
Spey
Loch an Eilein
Rothiemurchus Estate
Coire Cas
Cairngorm Mountain Railway
Kincraig
Cairngorm Skiing & Hiking Area
Avon
Highland Wildlife Park
Feshiebridge
Loch Insh
Insh
Cairngorm (1245m)
Lairig Ghru
Lairig Ghru Trail
To Fort William (48mi)
Kingussie
A86
B970
Sgoran Dubh Mor (1118m)
Loch Avon
Ben Avon (1171m)
Ben Macdui (1309m)
Beinn A'Chaorruinn (1066m)
Beinn a'Bhuird (1147m)
Newtonmore
A9
Braeriach (1296m)
Carn Ban Mor (1052m)
Loch Einich
Cairn Toul (1291m)
Glen Feshie
To Perth (68mi)
Meallbuidhe (627m)
Cairngorms National Park
Beinn Bhreac (930m)
To Aberdeen (58mi)
Mullach Clach a'Bhlair (1019m)
Feshie
Beinn Bhrotain (1157m)
ABERDEENSHIRE
Braemar
A93
Dee
To Perth (49mi)
Inverey

For other adventures **G2 Outdoors** (☎ 07946 285612; www.g2outdoor.co.uk; half-day trips from £20) does a range of activities including canoeing, rock climbing, abseiling and mountain biking.

Sleeping

BUDGET

There are several hostels and bunkhouses in Aviemore and along the Ski Rd.

Aviemore Bunkhouse (☎ 811181; www.aviemore-bunkhouse.com; Dalfaber Rd; dm/d/f £14/34/48; 💻 ♿) This independent hostel has really come into its own since we last visited, with a drying room, top-of-the-line security locks and en suite bathrooms in every bunkroom. Best of all, a Dennis-the-Menace mural greets you with a custard pie as you come upstairs.

Aviemore SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1104; www.syha.org.uk; 25 Grampian Rd; dm £14; 💻 ♿) At the start of the Ski Rd, this spacious hostel is kitted out with skiers and walkers in mind, with a drying room, pool table and internet. It may feel a little institutional, but there are some good family rooms. There's a 2am curfew.

Other recommendations:

Glenmore Camping & Caravan Park (☎ 861271; Loch Morlich; tent sites from £8) Good lochside location; 6 miles from Aviemore, along Ski Rd.

Cairngorm Lodge SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1137; www.syha.org.uk; Loch Morlich; dm £12; 🕑 mid-Dec–Oct; Ⓟ 💻) Six miles from Aviemore along Ski Rd; prebooking is advised.

Rothiemurchus Caravan Park (☎ 812800; tent sites/caravans from £13/20) Just 1.5 miles along the B970, it's the closest camp site to Aviemore.

MIDRANGE

Ardlogie Guest House (☎ 810747; www.ardlogie.co.uk; Dalfaber Rd; s/d from £25/40) This cheerful B&B is snuggled into a quiet spot behind the train station. A real bonus is that guests get free use of Dalfaber Golf & Country Club facilities, including Jacuzzi, gym and sauna.

Ravenscraig Guest House (☎ 810278; www.aviemoreonline.com; 141 Grampian Rd; s £25-35, d £45-55; Ⓟ ♿) Fitted out in dark wood, this friendly guesthouse, with king-size beds, is one of the better options on Aviemore's main street. Bike- and ski-storage areas make it a good option if you're keen to get active. Substantial breakfasts are enjoyed in the glassed-in conservatory that puts you outside regardless of the weather.

Kinapol Guest House (☎ 810513; Dalfaber Rd; s/d £27.50/45) The oldest guesthouse in town can teach the whippersnappers a thing or two. In a homy spot, it has clean, well-presented rooms with peach bedspreads and shared bathrooms. There's a roomy, green garden out the back.

Cairngorm Hotel (☎ 810233; www.cairngorm.com; Grampian Rd; s/d £31.50/80; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi) This large, historic place has reasonable rooms, though there's a creaky staircase and some fearsome *Braveheart*-style claymores in the foyer. The location is handy for trains and the rooms are spacious.

Other recommendations:

Glenmore Lodge (☎ 861256; www.glenmorelodge.org.uk; Loch Morlich; s/d £30/40; Ⓟ 💻 🏊) A training centre for outdoor activists; includes a gym, climbing wall and kayak pool.

MacKenzie's Highland Inn (☎ 810672; mackhotel@aol.com; 125 Grampian Rd; r £50; Ⓟ) A good one for families; a bit tacky and very child friendly.

TOP END

Corrour House Hotel (☎ 810220; www.corrourhousehotel.co.uk; Inverdruie; r per person from £70; 🕑 closed Nov) Like the sound of your own country estate within striking distance of the ski fields? A mile from Aviemore off Ski Rd, this boutique hotel may be as close as you'll get. Its gracefully decorated rooms are so perfect you might skip the slopes in favour of a lie-in, while the surrounding grounds offer deer spotting and short walks.

Eating & Drinking

Aviemore has no shortage of eateries, but few are particularly inviting.

Café Mambo (☎ 811670; Grampian Rd; mains £5-9; 🕑 9am-11pm daily, food served noon-8.30pm Sun-Thu, noon-7.30pm Fri & Sat) This is the hip spot in town, doubling as a bar and nightclub. By day it serves up bladder-bursting coffees to passing visitors and by night staff pour cocktails of their own evil devising. Meals include vegetarian and Tex Mex options such as Mean Muchacho (chilli and onion rings).

Skiing-Doo (☎ 810 392; 9 Grampian Rd; mains £6-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) This local institution recently changed hands, but still has the same great interior papered with skiing, beer and NFL memorabilia. Burgers are the speciality, with some hefty garlic butter to the Italian job, though big steaks also keep the punters happy. You can happily order an international beer here and ponder the stickers for a couple of hours; our favourite is 'Support your local mountain rescue – get lost'.

Old Bridge Inn (☎ 811137; 23 Dalfaber Rd; mains £9-13; 🕑 lunch & dinner; 💻) This sweet little boozer is a sanctuary from the touristed main street, thanks to its location tucked behind the train station. It serves up grub that's better than the usual pub nosh, with hefty steaks and affordable curries for the Aviemore Bunkhouse next door (which it runs).

Getting There & Away

BUS

Scottish Citylink buses travel to Edinburgh (£15, 3¼ hours, hourly), Glasgow (£15, 3½ hours, hourly), Inverness (£5, 45 minutes, 12 to 15 daily), Newtonmore/Kingussie (£5, 25 minutes, five to seven daily) and Pitlochry (£7, 1¼ hours, hourly).

Rapsons/Highland Country links Aviemore to Inverness (£5, 1¾ hours, three daily Monday to Friday) via Grantown-on-Spey (£3.90, 35 minutes, hourly).

TRAIN

There are direct train services to Glasgow and Edinburgh (both £34, three hours, three daily) and Inverness (£8.40, 40 minutes, nine daily).

Getting Around

Rapsons/Highland Country services link Aviemore and Cairngorm (20 minutes, three to eight daily).

Bothy Bikes (☎ 811111; Ski Rd, Inverdruie; half-/full-day rental £12/17; 🕑 9am-5.30pm), a mile down Ski Rd, offers in-depth advice on route planning.

The **Strathspey Steam Railway** (☎ 810725; www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk; adult/child round-trip ticket from £9.50/4.75; 🕑 Apr-Oct & Christmas) runs a loop of Aviemore, Boat of Garten and Broomhill.

AROUND AVIEMORE

Rothiemurchus Estate

The **Rothiemurchus Estate Visitor Centre** (☎ 01479-812 345; www.rothiemurchus.net; Ski Rd, Inverdruie; 🕑 9.30am-5pm) is a mile from Aviemore. The vast property, owned by a single family, has over 50 miles of footpaths, including some particularly attractive trails through the Caledonian pine forests and around enchanting **Loch an Eilein** with its island ruin. Visitors can also opt for ranger-guided walks, Land Rover tours, and fishing for rainbow trout at the estate's fish farm or in the River Spey. Pick up the free *Activities, Maps & Walks* brochure and the basic footpath maps.

Glenmore Forest Park

Around Loch Morlich, 6 miles from Aviemore, the Ski Rd passes through 8 sq miles of pine and spruce that make up Glenmore Forest Park.

The **Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01479-861220), near steely-grey Loch Morlich, has a small exhibition on forests, and sells the *Glen More Forest Guide Map* detailing local walks, which include the three-hour-return ascent of **Meall a'Bhuachallie** that looms over the loch. From here it's an easy walk to the popular **Loch Morlich Watersports Centre** (☎ 01479-861221; 🕑 May-Oct), a great spot for kids of all ages to learn basic sailing, windsurfing, and canoeing in placid, if chilly, waters off a pretty artificial beach.

Nearby, the **Cairngorm Reindeer Herd** (☎ 01479-861228; Glenmore; adult/child £8/4; 🕑 10am-4pm) gives you a chance to see the guys who deliver your Christmas presents in their natural habitat. Visits to the herd (11am) include patting and feeding.

Kincraig & Around

Kincraig, 7 miles southwest of Aviemore, is close to some great attractions. **Highland Wildlife Park** (☎ 01540-651270; www.highlandwildlifepark.org; adult/child £9.50/6.75; 🕑 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), 1.5 miles south of the village, features a drive-through safari-style park. Inside are animals that once roamed wild around this country, including shaggy European bison, capercaillie, wolf lynx, stately red deer and elegantly coiffed Przewalski's horses. If you're without a car, friendly staff will drive you around.

Serene **Glen Feshie** extends south from Kincraig into the Cairngorms, with a 4WD track to the head of the glen that makes for great mountain biking. **Glen Feshie Hostel** (☎ 01540-651323; glenfeshiehostel@totalise.co.uk; dm £9.50; 🅿), about 5 miles from Kincraig, is a bothy (shelter) that's popular with hikers. Rates include bed linen and a steaming bowl of porridge to start the day.

There are Citylink and Rapsons/Highland Country buses connecting Kincraig and Aviemore (six to eight buses daily).

Boat of Garten

☎ 01479 / pop 570

Boat of Garten is known as the Osprey Village, as these rare birds of prey nest nearby at the **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Loch Garten Osprey Centre** (RSPB; ☎ 831476; Grianan Tulloch; adult/child £2.50/50p; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Aug; ♿) in Abernethy Forest Reserve. Ospreys migrate here from Africa in spring and nest in tall pine trees. You can watch them from a state-of-the-art hide equipped with telescopes and video monitoring. The centre is signposted about 2 miles from the village.

The best way to get to Boat of Garten is on the Strathspey Steam Railway (see opposite).

KINGUSSIE & NEWTONMORE

☎ 01540 / pop 2392

If you think these two hamlets are just another pair of sleepy one-street towns, think again – because running between them is Scotland's best regional museum, the Highland Folk Museum. There's just a couple of miles between the villages, but this distance, and friendships, gets stretched in the fierce rivalry of regular shinty matches, a game related to hurling but tougher. The Kingussie branch of the museum serves as a **tourist office** (☎ 661297; Duke St; 🕑 Mon-Sat Apr-Oct).

Sights

The unmissable **Highland Folk Museum** (☎ 661307; www.highlandfolk.com) is divided into a branch for each village. **Kingussie Museum** (Duke St; adult/child £2/1, joint 2-day ticket £6.50; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Aug, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep & Oct; ♿) was Britain's first open-air museum, with its collection of relics based on the collection of anthropologist Dr Isabel Grant, including representations of a Lewis blackhouse (ancient cottage). The real highlights are at **Newtonmore Museum** (Kingussie Rd; adult/child £6/3.50, joint 2-day ticket £6.50; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Apr-Aug, 11am-4.30pm Sep, 11am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct; ♿), a huge outdoor complex that lets you travel between the 1700s and 1930s. Reconstructed from an archaeological dig, the 18th-century blackhouse village authentically evokes the period, from the peaty smoke fires to the rough straw of the rooves. Fast forward to the 20th century and there's a schoolhouse, sawmill and sweet little church. Time travel between the two sites is in dinky 1930s buses driven by chatty locals. The best feature of this attraction is the staff, cheerily re-creating history including displays of spinning, cobbling and not forgetting that prim school marm who busts you for bad spelling.

Activities

The **Monadhliath Mountains**, northwest of Kingussie, attract fewer hikers than the nearby Cairngorms and make an ideal destination for walkers seeking peace and solitude. However, during the deer-stalking season (August to October), check with the tourist office before setting out.

Sleeping & Eating

Strathspey Mountain Hostel (☎ 673694; www.newtonmore.com/strathspey; Main St, Newtonmore; dm/d/cottages £11/25/55) With a friendly owner, crackling fires, and dorms that only have three or four bunks, this is one of the best hostel bets in town. Cyclists appreciate the lockable shed and larger groups opt for the separate cottage, which sleeps six.

Auld Poor House (☎ 661558; www.auldpoorhouse.co.uk; Kincraig Rd, Kingussie; r £22-25; ♿) Artsy and attractive, this great B&B was originally built for itinerant workers (hence the name). Today it attracts a better class of itinerant cyclists and walkers who love its snug rooms (which include Klimt prints) and the scrumptious dinners (available on request). Best of all, one of the owners is a massage therapist (massages per 30 minutes/one hour £12/20).

Glen (☎ 673203; Main St, Newtonmore; s/d £30/50) Not just trading on its appearance in the TV series *Monarch of the Glen*, this congenial boozer tracks down international talent for its lunch and dinner menus (mains £5 to £9), which feature lamb tagine and top-notch curries as well as staples such as lamb shanks and salmon risotto. It still serves a cask beer called Glen Bogle, and regulars might even tell you about sharing the bar with Tom Baker.

Columba House Hotel (☎ 661402; Manse Rd, Kingussie; s/d £35/70) If *Sesame Street*'s Bert and Ernie ever wanted a special weekend away together they'd choose this cute and quirky spot. A quality in-house restaurant means they could happily stay in, and little touches like teddy bears on beds and rubber duckies in the bathroom would also appeal. If you're not a puppet, it's still a family-friendly spot with great breakfasts and an excellent location.

our pick **Cross** (☎ 661166; www.thecross.co.uk; Tweed Mill Brae, Ardbroilach Rd, Kingussie; s/d £80/100; 🕑 Tue-Sat mid-Feb–Dec) In an old tweed mill, this is casual luxury, with original fittings but new corner baths and individual CD players (with a shrewdly chosen collection of Scottish music). River views are beautiful but Room eight has a view of the red-squirrel feeding area, where the cutest of critters feed. If you're hungry, the restaurant downstairs is excellent (two-course dinner £37 to £39), serving up the likes of maize-fed guinea fowl and baked monkfish seasoned with red pepper and orange sauce. Even the fish and chips – Scrabster hake with burgundy potatoes no less – is an elaboration on a classic, without being gussied up.

Also recommended:

Laird's Bothy (☎ 661334; 68 High St, Kingussie; dm £10) Tucked behind the sometimes noisy Tipsy Laird, this is a reasonable budget option, especially if you drink half the night away in the bar.

Hermitage (☎ 662137; www.thehermitage-scotland.com; Spey St, Kingussie; s/d from £35/52) A quaint old residence that offers boutique beds in colour-themed rooms.

Getting There & Away

Kingussie and Newtonmore are on the main Edinburgh/Glasgow to Inverness route; there are Citylink bus services to Aviemore (£4, 25 minutes, five to seven daily) and Inverness (£7, one hour, six to eight Monday to Saturday, three Sunday). Rapsons/Highland Country runs a service (Monday to Friday) between Newtonmore and Inverness, calling at Kingussie, Kincraig, Aviemore and Carrbridge, with more frequent buses (school days only) between Kingussie and Aviemore.

There are trains, more stopping in Kingussie than Newtonmore, to Edinburgh (£33, 2½ hours, seven a day Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Inverness (£8, one hour, eight a day Monday to Saturday, four Sunday).

THE GREAT GLEN

The spectacular chain of long, thin lochs stretching from Inverness to Fort William could be axe wounds, bleeding crystal blue water. Created by geothermal activity over 400 million years ago, the line of lochs sits on a fault line with stunning Lochs Linnhe, Lochy, Oich and Ness all offering impressive scenery as well as a link between the coasts with the Caledonian Canal. Historically, this area has been fiercely contested as a communication route and has witnessed the bloody battles of Glen Coe and Culloden.

Activities

The **Great Glen Way**, a 73-mile walk from Inverness to Fort William via Drumnadrochit and Fort Augustus, is the perfect way to absorb the beauty of the glen's lochs and mountains, and explore the banks of Loch Ness. The route takes four days, but can be done in sections as day walks. At Fort William walkers can connect with the West Highland Way.

The footpath shares some sections with the 80-mile **Great Glen Cycle Route** via Fort Augustus, following the canals and gravel tracks through forests. The *Cycling in the Forest* leaflet, available from tourist offices and the Forestry Commission, provides details.

FORT WILLIAM & AROUND

☎ 01397 / pop 9902

Fort William claims the crown of Outdoor Capital of UK, and visiting it is all about getting out into the surrounding country. Backed by the magnificent Ben Nevis, you'll be strapping on your walking boots in summer, and skis to cut the white stuff of Glen Nevis in winter. It's at the end of the West Highland Way, so pubs will be packed with contented-looking hikers.

The township is marred by the ugly bypass that blocks the town centre from the delightful Loch Linnhe, plus the town itself can feel like a mall packed with tartan tat. When you feel like it's time to rouse yourself, walk up the ever-present Ben Nevis.

Orientation & Information

Fort William meanders along the edge of Loch Linnhe for several miles but has a fairly compact centre. The pedestrianised main street is the key to most dining options and other facilities, while accommodation tends to fall on side streets.

Glen Nevis (Ionad Nibheis) Visitor Centre (☎ 705922; 🕒 Easter–mid-Oct) Outside of town.

Library (High St; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon & Thu, 10am-6pm Tue & Fri, 10am-1pm Wed & Sat) Free internet access.

One World Internet Café (☎ 07976 961695; 123 High St; per hr £1.50; 🕒 10am-9pm)

Tourist office (☎ 0845 225 5121; fortwilliam@host.co.uk; Cameron Sq; per 20min £1; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

WEST HIGHLAND MUSEUM

Next to the tourist office, this **museum** (☎ 702169; Cameron Sq; adult/child £3/50p; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) has artefacts harking back to the Neolithic age with special attention given to Glen Coe and highland weaponry.

For a wee tipple, **Ben Nevis Distillery** (☎ 700200; Lochy Bridge; adult/child £4/2; 🕒 tours hourly 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jul & Aug) gives a free swig of their peaty whisky at the end of the tour.

WALKING

The most obvious hike is up Britain's highest mountain, **Ben Nevis** (1343m), but even though it's a tiddler compared with international mountains you'll need to prepare thoroughly. The weather at the top is often bad (with thick mist), even if it's sunny when you set off. Bring warm clothes, a detailed map, food and water.

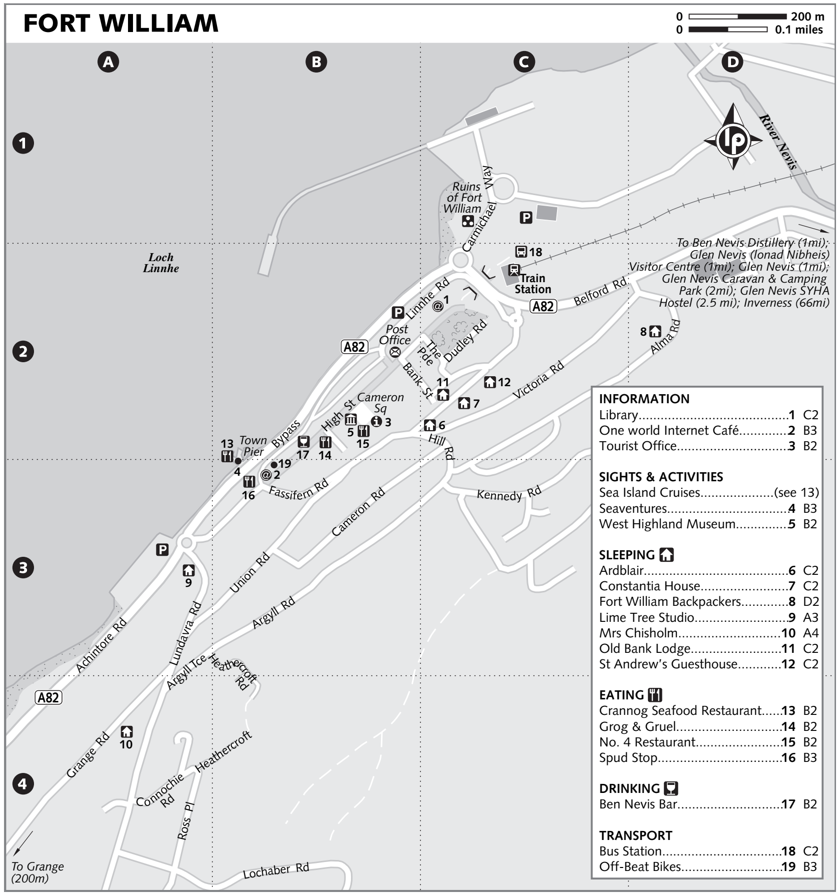
The path begins in Glen Nevis, southeast of town, either from the car park by Achintee Farm (reached by the road through Claggan), or from the Glen Nevis SYHA Hostel on the road up the glen. Both trails join after a mile, then head up to the summit and ruins of the old observatory. It takes at least 5½ hours return, but you should allow eight to be sure.

There are pleasant (far less strenuous) walks along Glen Nevis at the eastern end to beautiful **Steall Meadows**. You could also walk part of the **West Highland Way** from Fort William to Kinlochleven via Glen Nevis (14 miles).

The **Great Glen Way** concludes at the Old Fort in Fort William and many walkers hike the Fort William–Gairlochy section (21 miles return) in a day. It's a lovely scenic path overlooking the River Lochy, with views to Ben Nevis.

SKIING

There's good skiing at **Nevis Range** (☎ 705825; www.nevisrange.com; 1-day lift pass adult/child £23/13.50, instruction £39), with more than 30 runs to explore



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EATING 🍴		
Crannog Seafood Restaurant	13	B2
Grog & Gruel	14	B2
No. 4 Restaurant	15	B2
Spud Stop	16	B3
DRINKING 🍷		
Ben Nevis Bar	17	B2
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	18	C2
Off-Beat Bikes	19	B3

during the ski season (December to May, depending on snow).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

When the Nevis Range sheds its winter coat of snow, there's a competition-class **downhill mountain-bike trail** (bike hire & 1-day lift ticket £26; 🕑 11am-3pm mid-May–mid-Sep) which hosted the 2006 UCI Mountain Bike Championships. There's also 25 miles of waymarked mountain-bike trails, for all standards, in the nearby forest.

For wildlife spotting, two good operators are **Seaventures** (☎ 701687; www.seaventures-scotland.com; adult/child trips from £14/10) on the pier; and **Sea Island Cruises** (☎ 700714; www.crannog.net; adult/child £8/4), linked to the fish shop on the pier, which does 45-minute trips to see seals on the islands.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Mrs Chisholm (☎ 705548; 5 Grange Rd; r per person £12.50-17) Tough to spot, with limited signage, this place has just two rooms with great views of the loch. The welcome is as warm as whisky on a cold night and doubles are particularly roomy.

Old Bank Lodge (☎ 700070; www.bankstreetlodge.co.uk; Bank St; dm/s/d £13/25/43) This well-kept hostel, boasting a great location, is roomy, despite a smaller kitchen and lounge than some. Double and single rooms represent good value and feel more like hotel rooms.

Glen Nevis SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1120; www.syha.org.uk; Glen Nevis; dm £14; P 💻) A little spartan for flashpackers, this simple hostel at the start of the walking trails in Glen Nevis caters to hikers. They kick off their boots and doss comfortably in four-bunk dorms, which feel a bit tight if you've got a big backpack.

Other recommendations:

Glen Nevis Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 702191; www.glen-nevis.co.uk; Glen Nevis; tent sites £7.10-10.70, caravans from £10.50; 🕑 mid-Mar–Oct) A green spot with hedges for tent privacy; there's a bus to Glen Nevis.

Fort William Backpackers (☎ 700711; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com; Alma Rd; dm £13; 💻) Close to the train and bus stations; sociable hostel with nice lounge area.

MIDRANGE

Fassifern Rd is a popular spot for B&Bs.

Constantia House (☎ 702893; Fassifern Rd; s/d £24/40) Overlooking both town and lake, this snug B&B has several rooms to choose from, though they have more singles than most. Breakfast is the usual display of artery-straining hospitality.

St Andrew's Guesthouse (☎ 703038; www.fortwilliam-accommodation.co.uk; Fassifern Rd; s/d £25/40; 🕑 Jan-Oct; P) The best of the B&Bs on this stretch, this former schoolhouse and headmaster's quarters is something special. A stone's throw from the main street, it offers tranquillity, great views, large rooms, stained glass, and a touch of class beyond the norm in this town.

Lime Tree Studio (☎ 701806; www.limetreestudio.co.uk; Achintore Rd; s/d from £40/70) Undergoing substantial renovations at the time we visited, this is a fabulous blending of art gallery and B&B. Paintings here include several based on the magnificent views and you'll feel like you're in the country. Let's hope the renovations, to make a great spot even better, can keep the prices low.

TOP END

Ardblair (☎ 705832; www.ardblairfortwilliam.co.uk; Fassifern Rd; d £70) More like your own in-town estate house, this lovely place has a fragrant garden and wonderful views of town. There are just three rooms (book ahead), including the Pink and Blue rooms, all of which are done out in busy florals. If your eyes need a break, check out the views again.

Grange (☎ 705516; www.thegrange-scotland.co.uk; Grange Rd; d & tw £76-96; 🕑 Mar-Nov) Masquerading as a B&B, this is really a schmick boutique hotel with luxuriant grounds overlooking the loch and four rooms with chaise lounges and other antiques. Hosts turn on the charm, with blazing fires and formidable breakfasts to ensure a memorable stay.

Eating & Drinking

Grog & Gruel (☎ 705078; www.grogandgruel.co.uk; 66 High St; mains £4-9; 🕑 lunch & dinner) There's nothing gruelling about the playful Tex Mex menu that includes Mucho Macho Nachos and an array of Grog Dogs. And you couldn't accuse this pig-mascotted spot of pork-barrelling: it's all real cask ale. This newcomer has found its place at the dining trough, with a rollicking younger crowd who stay for a couple of beers. The upstairs restaurant will get you out of the common sty, but has the same menu.

No. 4 Restaurant (☎ 704222; Cameron Sq; lunch mains £6-9, dinner £10-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Next to the tourist office. This is Fort William's favoured spot for family celebrations for its dignified ambience and something-for-everyone menu. There are plenty of vegetarian options for teenagers going through 'that phase' and dads appreciate scallops with ginger-roasted veggies. It also has a few kids' options, while mums save room for puddings such as roasted pecan tart or good old bread-and-butter pudding.

Crannog Seafood Restaurant (☎ 705589; Town Pier; mains £13-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Right on the loch, you can almost imagine fish jumping into the pan at this place with superfresh food (in fact the restaurant has its own boats). The dinner views across the loch are the town's best as this is the only restaurant on the loch side of the bypass.

Also recommended:

Spud Stop (☎ 160671; Station Sq; snacks £2-5; 🕑 8am-10pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Mar) Refuel with top snacks, including lip-smacking venison burger and real coffee.

Ben Nevis Bar (☎ 702295; 105 High St) A large pub that's popular with hikers.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Scottish Citylink buses operate services to Edinburgh (£20, four hours, daily) and Glasgow (£14, three hours, three daily) both via Glencoe (30 minutes, five daily); Inverness (£8.90, two hours, five to six daily); Oban (£8.20, 1½ hours, four daily); and Portree (£17, three hours, three direct daily).

Shiel Buses (☎ 01967-431272) runs one bus daily, except Sunday, to/from Mallaig (£4.50, 1¼ hours) via Glenfinnan (35 minutes).

Rapsons/Highland Country (☎ 702373) runs buses to Kinlochleven (£3.30, 50 minutes, six daily) via Inchree, Onich, Ballachulish and Glencoe.

TRAIN

ScotRail (www.firstscotrail.com) runs trains from Glasgow to Fort William (£23, 3¾ hours, two or three daily) and from Mallaig (£8.10, 1½ hours, three or four daily). An overnight train connects Fort William and London Euston (return seat/bed £57/99, 13¼ hours), but you'll miss the wonderful views. An overnight Caledonian Sleeper service goes to London Euston (seated £73, sleeping cabin £119, 13 hours).

From May to October consider taking the **Jacobite Steam Train** (☎ 737751; www.steamtrain.info) that runs from Fort William to Mallaig (adult/child single from £27/15.50; Sunday to Friday). It has starred in the *Harry Potter* films as the Hogwarts' train.

Getting Around

Rapsons/Highland Country buses operate 11 services Monday to Saturday, and four on Sunday from June to September, between the bus station and the Glen Nevis SYHA Hostel. Buses to Corpach run every 20 to 25 minutes, except on Sunday when they're hourly.

Off-Beat Bikes (☎ 704008; www.offbeatbikes.co.uk; 117 High St; half-/full-day bike hire £10/15) really know biking, with tips on local trails and maps.

GLEN COE

Scotland's most famous glen is a pure microcosm of the magnificent Highlands, with heathered ranges, waterfalls, rivers and staggering mountains. Three massive, brooding spurs, known as the Three Sisters dominate the south, while the rim of the Aonach Eagach ridge, at 900m, looms in the north. Walkers of all abilities challenge themselves with a variety of spectacular hikes.

Glen Coe's notorious place in history came in 1692 when the MacDonalds were murdered by the Campbells in the bloody Glen Coe Massacre.

WALKING

This is serious walking country and you'll need maps, warm clothes, food and water. The **Glen Coe Visitor Centre** (☎ 811307; Inverigan; 🕑 daily Mar-Oct, Fri-Mon Nov-Feb) stocks lots of useful information.

There are several short walks around **Glencoe Lochan**, near the village. To get there, turn left off the minor road to the youth hostel, just beyond the bridge over the River Coe.

A more strenuous hike is into the **Lost Valley**, a magical mountain sanctuary still haunted by the ghosts of murdered MacDonalds (see the boxed text, p888). It's only a 2.5-mile round trip, but allow three hours. The walk begins at a rough path from the car park at Allt na Reigh (on the A82, 6 miles east of Glencoe village).

A great six- to seven-hour hike leads through the Lost Valley to the top of **Bidean nam Bian** (1141m).

Glencoe & Around

☎ 01855 / pop 334

Sixteen miles south of Fort William on the A82, this small village is besieged by soaring mountains on one side and Loch Leven on the other. The small thatched **Glencoe Folk Museum** (☎ 811664; adult/child £2/free; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) houses a historical collection, including militaria and costumes.

About 1.5 miles from the village, along the road into the glen is the excellent **Glen Coe Visitor Centre** (NTS; ☎ 811307; Inverigan; adult/concession £5/4;

THE GLEN COE MASSACRE

In an attempt to quash remaining Jacobite loyalties among the Highland clans, William III ordered clan chiefs to take a loyalty oath by the end of 1691. MacIain, the elderly chief of the MacDonalds of Glen Coe, missed his deadline.

The MacDonalds were to be punished as an example to other Highland clans, some of whom had not bothered to take the oath. A company of 120 soldiers, mainly of the Campbell clan, was sent to the glen. Since their leader was related by marriage to MacIain, the troops were billeted in MacDonald homes.

After they'd been guests for 12 days, the order came for the soldiers to kill all MacDonalds under the age of 70. Some Campbells alerted the MacDonalds to their intended fate, while others turned on their hosts at 5am on 13 February, shooting MacIain and 37 other men, women and children. Other MacDonalds fled into the snow, where many died of exposure.

There's a monument to MacIain in Glencoe village; members of the MacDonald clan still gather here on 13 February each year.

⌚ daily Mar-Oct, Fri-Mon Nov-Feb; ♿), a modern facility with an ecotourism bent. The centre presents information on geological, environmental and cultural history of Glen Coe via interactive displays. Kids will love Hamish the Scotty dog who acts as mascot. The story of the Glen Coe Massacre in all its gory detail is also told.

SLEEPING & EATING

Glen Coe SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1122; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; P 💻) A couple of miles from the village on the northern side of the River Coe, this austere hostel is a good spot to tuck the hiking boots under a bunk but has little to offer other than proximity to the Clachaig Inn.

Clachaig Inn (☎ 811252; www.clachaig.com; s/d from £38/42; 💻) This cheery historic inn, 2.5 miles southeast of Glencoe village, is the perfect conclusion to a hard day of walking. Aside from delightful rooms with soporific beds, there's the Bidean Lounge, a sophisticated restaurant completed with a vegan-friendly papier-mâché stags head. Out the back is the rustic Boots bar (bar meals £6 to £10), where there's a pool table and a busy jukebox.

Other recommendations:

Red Squirrel Campsite (☎ 811256; tent sites per person £6.50) In a beautiful green spot that's handy to Clachaig Inn; good info booth.

Ben Nevis Inn & Bunkhouse (☎ 701227, www.ben-nevis-inn.co.uk; by Claggan; dm £12, mains £7-12; ⌚ meals midday-9pm) Has simple dorm rooms and some tasty pub meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rapsons/Highland Country and Scottish Citylink run between Fort William and Glencoe (£4.30; 30 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday); the latter also operates to/from Glasgow (£13, 2½ hours, four daily).

Kinlochleven

☎ 01855 / pop 897

At North Ballachulish you can take the beautiful side road running up Loch Leven to Kinlochleven. As well as the excellent walking hereabouts, **Ice Factor** (☎ 831100; www.ice-factor.co.uk; guides per day £150, half-/full-day bike hire £12/18; ⌚ 9am-10pm) is a fine modern facility with indoor ice-climbing and rock-climbing walls, as well as instruction in mountaineering.

The West Highland Way passes through town and walkers often stay overnight here. The excellent **Blackwater Hostel** (☎ 831253; www.blackwaterhostel.co.uk; Lab Rd; camping £5, dm £11) is a pine-interior spot with a bright, open kitchen; it only takes smaller groups, so you won't be overrun by tour groups. It includes dedicated facilities for campers.

Kings House Hotel (☎ 851259; www.kingy.com; s/d from £24/48; P) is one of Scotland's oldest established inns with presentable rooms including some great singles (our favourite is number four for its views). It does well-priced hiker-sized portions of venison burgers and Cumberland sausages, but get in early for lunch (mains £6 to £9) as the outdoor tables have the best views and hence fill up quickly.

Glen Coe Ski Centre

About 1.5 miles east of Kings House Hotel, on the other side of the A82, is the car park and base station for this ski centre, where commercial skiing in Scotland first started in 1956. The **chair lift** (☎ 01855-851226; www.glencoemountain.com; 1-day lift pass £24; ⌚ year-round) is the easiest way to get to the dramatic 640m-high viewpoint. There are several good walks, and skiing in winter at **Glencoe Mountain Resort**.

LOCH NESS

Few things are as emblematically Scottish as the mythical monster that skulks in Britain's longest body of fresh water, which sinks to a depth of 129 fathoms. But Loch Ness, stretching 23 miles from Fort Augustus nearly as far as Inverness, has other, less obvious, intrigue. There's the Caledonian Canal, a vast 19th-century construction that uses Scotland's unique succession of lochs to carry ships through the centre of the country. Of course there's an industry of tartan tack built up around Nessie, but you might like to escape the monstrous clanging of cash registers and explore the smaller towns around this impressive loch.

The busy A82 traces the northwestern shore, while the more tranquil and picturesque B862 follows the southeastern shore. A complete circuit of the loch is about 70 miles, with the best views seen by travelling anticlockwise.

Drumnadrochit

☎ 01456 / pop 813

Seized by madNess (this is actually a T-shirt), the gift shops, pubs and cafés of this small town are ruled by the monstrous miss that exists to milk pounds from passing tourists. Ironically, the town isn't actually even on the lake; the road ducks inland at this point. Regardless, the friendly **tourist office** (☎ 459076; A82; ⌚ year-round) shells out leaflets on the area.

The better of the two rival exhibits telling the monster's tale is **Loch Ness 2000** (☎ 450573; www.loch-ness-scotland.com; adult/child £5.95/3.50; ⌚ 9am-8pm; ♿). It walks you from one audiovisual display to the next (through a surprisingly spooky fibreglass cave) giving a scientific account of the monster myth and the loch's ecology. When the 40-minute presentation ends, you're ejected into a labyrinthine gift shop.

Nearby the **Original Loch Ness Monster Centre** (☎ 450342; www.lochness-centre.com; adult/child £5/3.50, incl Braveheart Centre £6/3.75; ⌚ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5.30pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) has more signage than things to do. There's a the plaster Braveheart Centre with a painted Mel Gibson lookalike. The 30-minute audiovisual is kitschy-if-overpriced fun, with stories about David Bellamy's Nessie stunt and a WWF-impersonating warlock who casts a protection spell over the monster.

URQUHART CASTLE

Due to its sublime location overlooking Loch Ness, **Urquhart Castle** (HS; ☎ 450551; adult/child £6.50/2.50; ⌚ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) sees its fair share of tour buses. The entrance fee includes a short film and a chance to get close to the reconstructed trebuchet (a medieval form of a catapult).

The castle was repeatedly sacked, damaged and rebuilt over the centuries, just as the Great Glen was regularly pillaged and its inhabitants robbed. It was finally blown up in 1692 to prevent Jacobites using it; what remains perches dramatically on the loch's edge.

Several cruises pass or stop at the castle (see p891 and p890).

SLEEPING & EATING

Loch Ness Backpackers Lodge (☎ 450807; www.lochness-backpackers.com; East Lewiston; dm £12.50, d & tw £30, f £45; P 💻) This colourful place (check out those murals) has six-bunk dorms out the back that feel surprisingly spacious. There are two kitchens for convenience, and a Continental breakfast (£2) on offer. There's also bike hire (half-day £6) and a large barbecue with which to enjoy the good weather. To get here from Drumnadrochit take the A82 towards Fort William and turn left at the sign for the Loch Ness Inn.

Benleva Hotel (☎ 450080; www.lochnesshotel.com; Drumnadrochit; d & tw £60) This sanctuary from monster mania is tucked off the main road (follow signs) and has quality rooms in a former church manse. The pub downstairs sells does local ales and single malts, as well as some dignified pub grub (lunch and dinner) which scored it Highland Pub of the Year in 2005.

Smiddy (☎ 450755; Lewiston; lunches £3-6; ⌚ noon-3pm) Just south of Drumnadrochit, this casual place does good beer, coffee and burgers with nary a mention of certain submarine creatures. It's also a good spot for a game of pool with locals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink has bus services along Loch Ness between Fort William (£9.20, 1½ hours, five to six daily) and Inverness (£5; 30 minutes, seven to eight daily), which goes via Drumnadrochit.

Fort Augustus

☎ 01320 / pop 508

Once the headquarters for General Wade's military road-building in the 18th century, today Fort Augustus marches to the tourist drum, serving as both the gateway to Loch Ness and a sweet little township in itself. The township is at the convergence of Lochs Ness and Oich, which form the impressive Caledonian Canal.

The **tourist office** (☎ 366367; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct), in the central car park, charges £3 for local accommodation bookings. There's internet access a few doors up at **Neuk Internet Café & Restaurant** (☎ 366208; per hr £6; 🕒 10am-8pm).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At Fort Augustus, boats using the **Caledonian Canal** are raised and lowered 12m through five cascading locks. You can watch boats being led on ropes, like obedient Labradors, through the locks; it's even more of a spectacle when skyscraper-like cruise liners pass through. Built from 1803 to 1822, the canal once conducted paddlesteamers between Glasgow and Inverness with a total of 29 locks between the Scotland's east and west coasts.

You can find out more about this amazing engineering project at the **Caledonian Canal Heritage Centre** (☎ 366493; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct). You can also book the **Loch Ness Express** (www.lochnessexpress.com) which heads past Urquhart Castle on the way to Inverness (adult/child one-way £13/8, return £25/15; four daily). Also departing from Fort Augustus, **Cruise Loch Ness** (☎ 0366277; www.cruiselochness.com; adult/child £8.50/5) does a one-hour cruise on the *Royal Scot*.

SLEEPING & EATING

Morag's Lodge (☎ 366289; moragslodge@hotmail.com; Bunnoich Brae; dm/d £12.50/30; P 💻 ♿) This first-rate hostel has cheery dorms named for Scottish films. There's a cheap buffet dinner available, massive kitchen and sociable bar, plus some fairly spectacular views from its location off the main road in the northern part of town.

Bank House B&B (☎ 366755; Station Rd; s/d £22/50) Behind an actual bank on a terrace above the locks, this basic-but-budget place has lovely Loch Ness views and a small library to keep you busy.

As you wander along the canal there are several scenic spots in which to eat. Try the wittily named pub, the **Lock Inn** (☎ 366302; mains £8-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner), which does great seafood, or bustling **Neuk Café Bar** (☎ 366208; meals £5-8; 🕒 9am-6pm), which does breakfasts until midday, including the massive Climbers Breakfast.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink buses from Inverness to Fort William stop at Fort Augustus (£8, 1¼ hours, five or six daily).

INVERNESS

☎ 01463 / pop 44,500

The hub of the Highlands is one of the fastest growing cities in Scotland. It's no accident that a large shopping centre is conveniently placed near the train station; folk from surrounding towns flock to Inverness to shop and enjoy the city's eateries. Snuggled into the Moray Firth and handy to Loch Ness, Inverness was ideally placed for the Caledonian Canal, and later rail and road links established it as a transport nexus. Whether you're going Nessie-spotting or heading for the remote Orkneys, you'll pass through this bustling town.

Get acquainted with the town by strolling along the river. You'll probably happen upon a pub in which to while away the hours or an eatery that takes your fancy. While attractions are limited within the city there's plenty around the city, from Macbeth's castle to the legendary Jacobite battlefield of Culloden.

Information

Main Post Office (Queensgate; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat)

New City Laundry (☎ 242507; 15 Young St; 🕒 daily) Coin-operated launderette with internet access (per hour £2.50).

Public library (☎ 236463; Margaret St; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 234353; inverness@host.co.uk; Castle Wynd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Nov-May, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jun & Jul, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-4pm Sun Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep & Oct) Currency exchange, accommodation booking, and CalMac ferry office. It also books tickets for tours and has internet access (per hour £2.50).

Sights

Dominating the town, **Inverness Castle** is a whippersnapper compared with some of the aged Highland fortifications. The current pastel-hued structure was built in the mid-19th century. Nevertheless it's a grand structure that shows a spectrum of colours at sunset and dawn. The building currently serves as the Sheriff's Court, so you'd have to break the law to get 'entry'.

With a lack of big-ticket landmarks, the real pleasure here is taking a walk along the River Ness, which is latticed with walking bridges, particularly around the attractive picnic spot of the **Ness Islands**. You'll also pass grand **St Andrew's Cathedral** dating from 1869, where the bell still chimes on the hour. You can grab a copy of the free pamphlet *Riverside Guide* from the tourist office for a self-guided tour.

Tours

Trips to the Highlands and Orkneys are popular from Inverness and can all be booked at the **tourist office** (☎ 234353; inverness@host.co.uk; Castle Wynd).

BUS TOURS

Canny Tours (☎ 854411; www.cannytours.com; 1-day £25) A fun multistop day tour that includes Loch Ness, Glen Coe, and even some weapon wielding.

City Sightseeing (☎ 224000; 🕒 Easter & late May-Sep) Does a good 45-minute tour (adult/child £6/3) of the city.

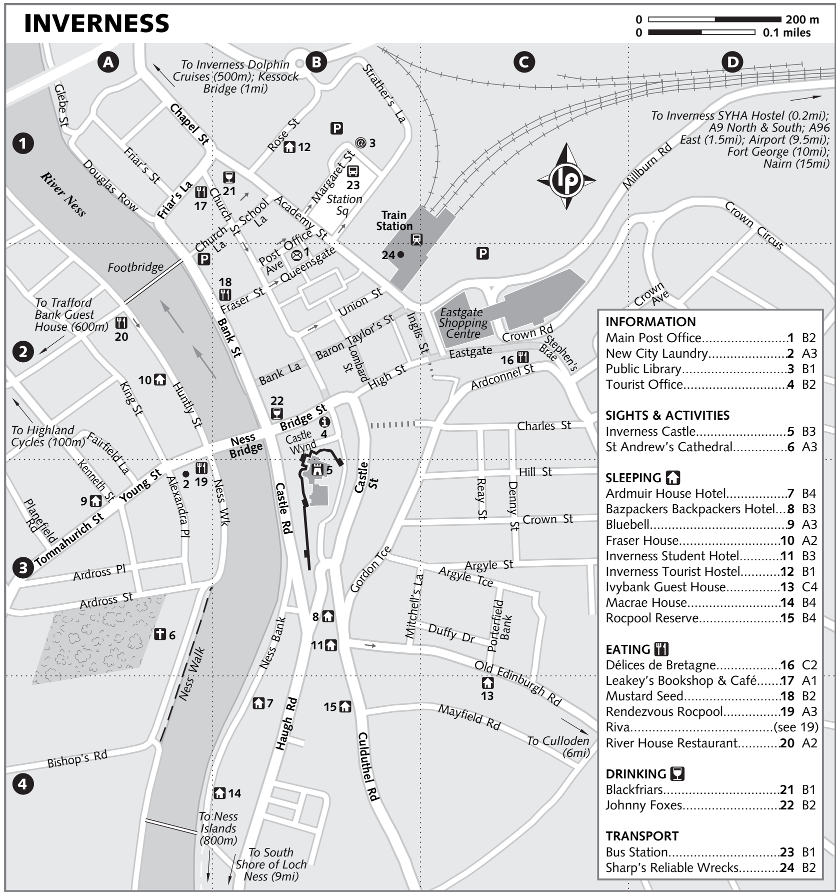
John o'Groats Ferries (☎ 01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk) Runs day trips to the Orkney Islands (adult/child £46/23) departing at 7.30am June to September.

Puffin Express (☎ 717181; www.puffinexpress.co.uk) A range of tours up to the Orkneys and around Inverness.

CRUISES

Inverness Dolphin Cruises (☎ 717900; Shore St Quay, Shore St; 1½hr cruise adult/child £12.50/9; 🕒 10.30am-6pm Mar-Oct) Looks for dolphins, seals and bird life; great commentary.

Jacobite Queen (☎ 233999; www.jacobite.co.uk) Cruises down Loch Ness via Urquhart Castle (adult/child £12/10), with a free minibus pick-up from the tourist office (9.30am, 10.30am and 1.15pm).


0 200 m
0 0.1 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To Inverness Dolphin Cruises (500m); Kessock Bridge (1mi)
To Inverness SYHA Hostel (0.2mi); A9 North & South; A96 East (1.5mi); Airport (9.5mi); Fort George (10mi); Nairn (15mi)
River Ness
Glebe St
Chapel St
Friar's St
Friar's La
Douglas Row
Rose St
Strather's La
Margaret St
Station Sq
Academy St
Church St
School La
Church La
Post Office Ave
Queensgate
Train Station
Millburn Rd
Crown Circus
Crown Ave
Footbridge
Fraser St
Union St
Baron Taylor's St
Lombard St
Inglis St
Eastgate Shopping Centre
Eastgate
Crown Rd
Stephen's Brae
Ardconnel St
High St
Bank La
Bank St
To Trafford Bank Guest House (600m)
King St
Huntly St
To Highland Cycles (100m)
Fairfield La
Kenneth St
Young St
Tomnahurich St
Planefield Rd
Alexandra Pl
Ness Wk
Ness Bridge
Bridge St
Castle Wynd
Castle Rd
Castle St
Charles St
Hill St
Reay St
Denny St
Crown St
Argyle St
Argyle Tce
Gordon Tce
Mitchell's La
Duffy Dr
Porterfield Bank
Old Edinburgh Rd
Mayfield Rd
To Culloden (6mi)
Ardross Pl
Ardross St
Ness Bank
Ness Walk
Haugh Rd
Culduthel Rd
Bishop's Rd
To Ness Islands (800m)
To South Shore of Loch Ness (9mi)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

INVERNESS

INFORMATION		
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New City Laundry	2	A3
Public Library	3	B1
Tourist Office	4	B2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Inverness Castle	5	B3
St Andrew's Cathedral	6	A3
SLEEPING		
Ardmuir House Hotel	7	B4
Bazpackers Backpackers Hotel	8	B3
Bluebell	9	A3
Fraser House	10	A2
Inverness Student Hotel	11	B3
Inverness Tourist Hostel	12	B1
Ivybank Guest House	13	C4
Macrae House	14	B4
Rocpool Reserve	15	B4
EATING		
Délices de Bretagne	16	C2
Leakey's Bookshop & Café	17	A1
Mustard Seed	18	B2
Rendezvous Rocpool	19	A3
Riva	(see 19)	
River House Restaurant	20	A2
DRINKING		
Blackfriars	21	B1
Johnny Foxes	22	B2
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	23	B1
Sharp's Reliable Wrecks	24	B2

Loch Ness Express (☎ 0800 328 6426; www.lochnessexpress.com) Heads past Urquhart Castle as it shuttles between Fort Augustus and Inverness (adult/child one-way £13/8, return £25/15, four daily).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Inverness Student Hotel (☎ 236556; www.scotlands-top-hostels.com, www.macbackpackers.com; 8 Culduthel Rd; dm £11-12; 🅿 💻) Lording it over the castle and the river, this fun-packed place is brightly painted with dorms that vary from four to 10 beds (depending on how much you pay). It's got the feel of a slightly shambling student house with a sitting room that hosts occasional music jams, and plenty of hooking-up with fellow travellers. It looks after you with organised trips down to pubs, laundry service (£2.50) and bike hire (per day £12), but the 2.30am curfew is harsh for party animals.

Bazpackers Backpackers Hotel (☎ 717663; bazmail@btopenworld.com; 4 Culduthel Rd; dm/d £12/30; 💻) Overlooking the river and cathedral, this inviting spot has several comfortable nooks, including the four-bed dorms and garden with barbecue. You can curl up in a log-fired lounge (with its collection of international coins embedded in the wall), or make the most of the 24-hour access. If you've felt lost in the bigger institutional places, this little hostel is for you.

Inverness Tourist Hostel (☎ 241962; www.invernesshostel.com; 24 Rose St; dm £12) Looking for the party place that's close to the station, in case you need to skip town in a hurry? You've found it at this pad that has tight ditch-bags-and-go-out bunkage with a lounge that's all about the flat-screen telly playing music videos. Still not convinced that this is party central? Check its guestbook, which is called 'Comments and Drunken Stories'.

Inverness SYHA Hostel (☎ 231771; www.syha.org.uk; Victoria Dr; dm/tr/q £13/50/66, tw & d £36; 🅿 💻 ♿) Hostels like this are the reason the SYHA has survived all these years: by providing all things to all people. It has a separate kitchen and dining room to keep big groups out of the way, and offers doubles for travelling couples, as well as roomy dorms. Spick-and-span with a pine feel throughout, there are plenty of facilities: free luggage storage, space-age gleaming kitchen and two lounges (one with a pool table). It's just 15 minutes' walk from the train station.

MIDRANGE

B&Bs abound in Inverness; pricier options line the river, while Old Edinburgh Rd and Ardconnel St are cheaper hunting grounds.

Ivybank Guest House (☎ 232796; www.ivybankguesthouse.com; 28 Old Edinburgh Rd; s/d from £30/60; 🅿) This Heritage-listed home has been lovingly restored, retaining stained-glass windows and mahogany staircases. It's a family-run place with sweet service from all except the irritable cat. The room upstairs with the four-poster is always popular.

Trafford Bank Guest House (☎ 241414; www.traffordbankguesthouse.co.uk; 96 Fairfield Rd; s £50, d £80-98; 🅿 💻 wi-fi) It's worth straining your budget to stay at this urbane B&B with nary a ceramic kitten in sight. The lemon walls and understated tartan is tasteful; Arran Aromatic toiletries and iPod speaker docks are just some of the little luxuries. Even the radiators are opulently gold.

our pick **Bluebell** (☎ 238201; www.bluebell-house.com; 31 Kenneth St; d & tw £60) Effervescent hosts warmly greet you when you arrive and you'll leave feeling as though you've made friends for life. This place is the antithesis of disinterested B&B. It goes for thoughtful extras like a modest DVD library, welcome trays and breakfast that includes boneless kippers and homemade whisky marmalade. Your hosts also cheerfully offer itinerary-setting tips on the local area.

Macrae House (☎ 243658; joycemacrae@hotmail.com; 24 Ness Bank; d £60; 🅿) So many guesthouses are a product of their owners' tastes and whims, often to disastrous effect. Luckily this charming spot's cheerful owner decorated her place tastefully, with modish art, leather furniture and, in one room, a mosaiced bathroom. The large collection of pigs is borderline, but river views here are some of the most affordable on this strip.

Other recommendations:

Ardmuir House Hotel (☎ 231151; www.ardmuir.com; 16 Ness Bank; s/d from £36/60) Small, family-run Georgian hotel with a pleasant, riverside setting.

Fraser House (☎ 716488; 49 Huntly St; www.fraserhouse.co.uk; d £50) Large rooms in a historic building by the riverside; friendly Antipodean host.

TOP END

Rocpool Reserve (☎ 240089; Culduthel Rd; www.rocpool.com; d from £95-230) Jumping into the hotel business, Rocpool has proven it can more than keep its head above water with this swanky boutique hotel. Cool white corridors open into smart rooms, decorated with Thai furniture in chocolate and blacks. At the top of the scale, decadent rooms have balcony hot-tubs; see-into showers led to this sophisticated pad voted Sexiest Hotel by hospitality pundits. Slip into something more comfortable and see for yourself.

Eating & Drinking

Leakey's Bookshop & Cafe (☎ 239947; Greyfriars Hall, Church St; snacks £3-5; 🕐 10.30am-4.30pm) This national-treasure bookshop has an upstairs teashop that more than supplies a break from browsing through volumes, though you can keep reading as you enjoy a cake or soup. It's also a good spot for a literary brunch.

Délices de Bretagne (☎ 712422; 6 Stephen's Brae; light meals £5-7; 🕐 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Bonnie Prince Charlie may have fared better if he'd tried to convert the British with artful Scottish-French fusion cuisine like this, rather than invading. With Art Nouveau décor, this is the perfect place to sup coffee and dunk croissants. Try its range of tasty *galettes* (savoury pancakes) and sweet crepes before heading out to continue your campaign to conquer Inverness.

Mustard Seed (☎ 220220; 16 Fraser St; 2-course lunch £6, mains £12; 🕐 lunch & dinner; ♿) At this two-level local favourite, you should head upstairs to the flowered balcony that overlooks the river. The menu is Mediterranean-inspired but doesn't take itself too seriously, using the best Scottish produce and wandering into such dishes as char-grilled sea bass with minty salsa and curried pork on egg noodles.

Rendezvous Rocpool (☎ 717274; 1 Ness Walk; 2-course lunch £7.95, mains £12-18; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Just across the bridge from the heart of town, this sophisticated eatery, with its *de rigueur* name and polished wooden floorboards, offers a range of mouth-watering choices. From toothsome snack-sized portions of southern European creations to the elaborate main dishes, there's quality all the way, and plenty of vegetarian options, too.

Riva (☎ 237377; 4-6 Inverness Walk; meals £9-15; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Despite the pretentious spelling, this place flaunts the waterside locale where it does great pastas and Italian-influenced meat-based dishes. Want a sample? Tuck into the sea bass fillet with giant tiger prawns on a tarragon mash. You should save some room for the delicious desserts and not fill up on the delicious variety of breads (our favourite was shot through with onion and cheese).

River House Restaurant (☎ 222033; cnr Greig & Ness Walk; lunch £11, 2-course meal £24; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Locals like to keep this neighbourhood restaurant a secret. At dinner you can choose mains such as wood pigeon on black pudding drowning in dark chocolate sauce or duck with plum and ginger sauce on a bed of mushroom risotto. Lunches are more basic (fish and chips with mushy peas or pork Milanese), but good value. Everything is served on big green plates that you'll be swiping clean.

Other recommendations:

Blackfriars (☎ 233881; 93-95 Academy St, 🕐 ceilidhs Mon & Wed) A sound traditional alehouse that has excellent live-music sessions and ceilidhs.

Johnny Foxes (☎ 236577; cnr Bridge & Bank Sts) Waterside watering hole where sauced-up locals have been known to take the odd swim.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ten miles east of town at Dalcross, **Inverness airport** (☎ 01667-464000) offers flights to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stornoway, Kirkwall, Sumburgh and other centres, as well as London Luton with **easyJet** (☎ 0870 600 0000).

BUS

Buses to Aberdeen (£10.50, 3¾ hours, hourly) are run by Stagecoach Bluebird. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) operates buses to/from London (£39, 13½ hours, one daily). **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) runs buses to/from Edinburgh (£17, four hours, hourly); Fort William (£10, two hours, five daily); Glasgow (£17, four hours, hourly); Portree (£12, 3½ hours, two daily); Thurso (£3, 3½ hours, four or five daily); and Ullapool (£7.70, 1¼ hours, two daily from Monday to Saturday). **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.megabus.com) offers fares from as little as £3 for buses from Inverness to Glasgow and Edinburgh, £1 to Perth and £16 to London.

The **Orkney Bus** (☎ 611 353; www.jogferry.co.uk) is a bus-ferry-bus service between Inverness and Kirkwall (return £42, four daily) via John o'Groats (p921).

TRAIN

There are direct trains to Edinburgh (£34, 3¼ hours, hourly), Glasgow (£34, 3½ hours, 11 daily, including some services changing in Aberdeen), Aberdeen (£19.90, 2¼ hours, five to 10 daily), London (£110, eight hours, daily) and Thurso (£14, 3½ hours, one to two daily).

The Kyle of Lochalsh line (£16, 2½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) is one of the great scenic journeys in Britain.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A promised rail link to the airport should arrive by 2009, until then **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 710555; www.rapsons.com) bus 11 runs from the airport to Queensgate in the city centre (£2.80, 20 minutes, at least hourly). A taxi costs around £15.

BICYCLE

There are great cycling opportunities out of Inverness and several rental outlets including **Highland Cycles** (☎ 234789; 16a Telford St; 1-day hire £12).

BUS

Local buses go as far afield as Nairn, Forres, Culloden battlefield and Cawdor and are operated by **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 710555). The Tourist Trail Roverbus (£6) gives unlimited travel on buses to Inverness, Nairn, Culloden, Cawdor Castle and Fort George.

CAR

The tourist office's free *Visitor Guide* includes a handy section on car hire. As well as the big boys there's **Sharp's Reliable Wrecks** (☎ 236684; 1st fl, Highland Rail House, Station Sq; 1-day hire from £25), an excellent set-up where the cars are much better than the name suggests.

AROUND INVERNESS

Culloden

The Battle of Culloden in 1746, the last battle fought in Britain, saw the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the slaughter of more than 1200 Highlanders in a 68-minute rout. Six miles east of Inverness, the forlorn 49-hectare moor where the conflict took place has scarcely changed. The site, with its many markers and memorials, is always open and provides a reflective place to ponder this fearsome battle.

The duke of Cumberland was dubbed 'Butcher Cumberland' for his brutal treatment of the defeated Scots. The battle sounded the death knell of the old clan system, with the Clearances (p897) following soon after.

The **visitors centre** (NTS; ☎ 01463-790607; adult/child £5/4; ⏲ 9am-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 11am-4pm Nov, Dec, Feb & Mar, closed Jan) isn't great value for money but presents some background information on the battle and has good audio guides to the site. There are also one-hour guided tours (adult/child £4/2) which are presented with plenty of enthusiasm and feature fully kilted guides. At the time of research a project to build a larger memorial was underway – slated to open in 2007.

Cawdor

The 14th-century **Cawdor Castle** (☎ 01667-404401; www.cawdorcastle.com; adult/child £7.30/4.50, gardens only £3.70; ⏲ 10am-5pm May–mid-Oct) was reputedly the castle of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and includes a glory hole with a cauldron for re-enacting bubble-bubble scenes. The central tower dates from the 14th century, but the wings are 17th-century additions. The castle is still inhabited, opulently furnished and casually includes treasures, like Dali cartoons, in the Tower Room. Explanatory notes are written in a humorous style by the former Count of Cawdor himself.

The grounds are impressive and you can have a round of golf (£9) or fish for salmon (per day £525 to £575) here. In summer the castle hosts plays, concerts and other cultural happenings; check its website for details.

Fort George

Sprawling over much of the headland, **Fort George** (HS; ☎ 01667-462777; adult/child £6/2.40; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Easter-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar; ♿) is a well-conserved 18th-century artillery fortification – one of Europe's best examples of its kind. Completed in 1769 as a base for George II's army, it remains a barracks. The mile-plus stroll around the ramparts offers stunning sea views; you may spot dolphins. You'll need half a day to look around; the visitors centre has maps.

It's off the A96 about 11 miles northeast of Inverness.

Black Isle & Cromarty

Actually a peninsula rather than an island, Black Isle is reached by **Kessock Bridge**.

In Rosemarkie, the **Groam House Museum** (☎ 01381-620961; admission by donation; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Easter & May-Sep, 2-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) has a superb collection of Pictish stones engraved with designs that share a similarity with Celtic motifs.

The attractive village of Cromarty at the peninsula's northeastern end has the notable 18th-century **Cromarty Courthouse** (☎ 01381-600418; Church St; adult £3.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, noon-4pm Nov-Dec & Mar), which details the town's history with contemporary references; kids love the goofy talking mannequins.

Rapsons/Highland Country shuttles from Inverness to Rosemarkie (30 minutes, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday); most (none on Sunday) continue onto Cromarty (£5.40; 55 minutes).

Brodie Castle

Set in 70 hectares of parkland, **Brodie Castle** (NTS; ☎ 01309-641371; adult/child £8/5; ⏲ noon-4pm Easter-Apr, Jul & Aug, noon-4pm Sun-Thu May, Jun & Sep) has several highlights, including an early-19th-century library, which has more than 6000 dusty, peeling books. There are some wonderful clocks, and a 17th-century dining room with wildly extravagant mythological carvings in the plaster ceiling (you'd swear it was woodcarving). The Brodies have lived here since 1160; the present structure was built in 1567, with many extensions being added over the years.

The castle is 8 miles east of Nairn. Stagecoach Bluebird runs to Brodie from Inverness (£4.90, 45 minutes, hourly), via Culloden.

EAST COAST

As you work your way north along the scimitar blade of the east coast, the desolation that the Clearances cut through this country becomes apparent. The road slices through the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths heading north along scenic coastline and, from Helmsdale, the impact of Viking raiders endures in the place names. The interior is dominated by the vast and mournful Sutherland mountain range, interrupted by seaside towns moored precariously along this wild coast's edge.

Getting Around

The region is well served by buses, and trains follow the coast up to Wick then across to Thurso. **Scottish Citylink** (☎ 08705 505050) runs regular bus services from Inverness to Wick, stopping at most towns on the A9 and A99 along the way, before taking the short cut inland to Thurso. **Rapsons/Highland Country** (☎ 01463-222244) operates buses from Wick to Thurso, via the coast and John o'Groats.

TAIN & AROUND

Scotland's oldest royal burgh, Tain is ennobled by sandstone buildings and a pilgrim history. You can get oriented with the free town audio tour at **Tain Through Time** (☎ 01862-894089; Tower St; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug), a heritage centre spanning three buildings, which describes history from the time of St Duthac through to the Reformation. St Duthac was born in Tain, died in Armagh (Ireland) in 1065, and is commemorated by the 12th-century ruins of **St Duthac's Chapel**, and St Duthus Church. Drop by the excellent **Glenmorangie Distillery** (☎ 01862-892477; www.glenmorangie.com; tours adult/child £2.50/1; ⏲ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 10.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug), which produces fine Highland malt, sherries and madeiras.

The A9 crosses Dornoch Firth. Alternatively, from Ardgay at the head of Dornoch Firth a small road leads to **Croick**, the scene of notorious evictions during the 1845 Highland Clearances. Refugee crofters from Glencalvie scratched their tragic messages on the eastern windows of **Croick Church**.

From Ardgay you can follow the Kyle of Sutherland, which leads after 4.5 miles to **Carbisdale Castle** (the last castle to be built in Scotland, dating from 1917), which now houses the extraordinary **Carbisdale Castle SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1109; www.syha.org.uk; Culrain; dm £13.50; ⏲ Mar-Oct; 💻). Good enough to house the exiled Norwegian royal family, this opulent place is first-rate hostelling, with grand salons, great views, and a top-floor ghost. Booking is advised, as it's a popular group destination. The sweeping **Bonar Bridge** then crosses the head of the firth to rejoin the A9 just before Dornoch.

DORNOCH & AROUND

☎ 01862 / pop 1206

Scotland's last executed witch perished in a vat of boiling tar in Dornoch in 1722, but these days locals are more likely to spoil you to death. Sandstone, summer flowers and nearby stretches of beach have made Dornoch a popular escape from Inverness.

The **tourist office** (☎ 810916; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) is in the main square. It hires bikes for £12 a day and has internet access.

To see this town's fascinating past, visit the displays of **Historylinks Museum** (☎ 811275; www.historylinks.org.uk; adult/child £2/free; ⏲ 10am-4pm daily Jun-Sep, Mon-Fri Apr & May, Wed & Thu Oct-Mar).

Built in the 13th century by St Gilbert, **Dornoch Cathedral** is a rough-stone edifice known for its beautiful, wedding-photo interior, with a crisscrossing of light shafts from stained-glass windows.

Sleeping & Eating

Dornoch has several camp sites and plenty of B&Bs.

Trevose Guest House (☎ 810269; trevose@amserve.net; Cathedral Sq; s/d from £25/47; 🕐 Mar-Sep) This pleasant guesthouse is well placed, with rooms that vary from the majestic Room one with castle and cathedral views to others with shared bathrooms; ask to see one before you lug your bags upstairs. There are a few quirky decorative touches such as an old sea chest in one room, or an odd cupboard shower in another.

Dornoch Castle (☎ 810216; www.dornochcastlehotel.com; Castle St; chalet £60-80, castle r £110-140; ♿) This 16th-century former bishop's palace gives you the royal treatment, with large wrought-iron beds, plasma TVs, and sherry and chocolates. The chalets out the back are less impressive, but this is definitely where you'll take plenty of photos to make the folks back home envious. The pub has a roaring open fire, real ale and some good pub grub (bar meals £6 to £9); the restaurant (meals £9 to £15) serves fancier fare.

Quail 2 (☎ 811811; Castle St; www.2quail.com; d £95) Dornoch's restaurant with rooms is decked out in tasteful dark woods, and yes there's tartan but it's tasteful. As you'd expect of a luxury spot, rooms are crammed full of features such as full-sized baths and a quirky selection of books. The menu is impressive (dinner £39), with starters of pheasant salad and roast Ross-shire lamb; a night's stay includes a four-course dinner as well as breakfast.

Dornoch Patisserie (☎ 811148; 1 High St; 🕐 Tue-Sun) This swish spot is known for its coffee and cakes. It's behind the cathedral, in a quiet pocket where you might even escape tourists.

Getting There & Away

Scottish Citylink has bus services to/from Inverness (£6.80, 1¼ hours, four to five daily) and Thurso (£10.30, 2¼ hours, four to five daily), stopping at Dornoch's square.

DUNROBIN CASTLE

A mile north of Golspie is **Dunrobin Castle** (☎ 01408-633177; adult/child £6.80/4.70; 🕐 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep–mid-Oct), the largest house in the Highlands (187 rooms), dating from the 13th century. Most of the elaborate fairy-tale architecture is a result of a French chateau–style expansion in 1841, but the building is better known for the villainous Duke of Sutherland, who cleared 15,000 people from the north of Scotland while residing here.

Only 22 rooms are on display, along with the museum which houses a gruesome collection of big-game trophies including a pair of snapping crocodiles, a small killer whale, elephant-feet umbrella stands and other non-PC artefacts. The beautifully kept grounds are the venue for amazing falconry displays (11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm), where birds swoop with Rottweiler ferocity.

CAITHNESS

A vulnerable stretch of coast, this area served as a revolving door for the Viking raiders who long held sway over this area. Inland is a remote bogland, a haven for birds. On the coast, green-swathed cliffs drop abruptly to the seas; harbours that flourished on the herring trade nestle at their base. These days the region is getting a name for its produce thanks to Prince Charles' interest in the Mey Selections, a food award that highlights the region's best nosh.

Helmsdale

☎ 01431 / pop 861

This sheltered fishing town is fringed by heather-hued hills and was once a major herring fishing centre, with a name that points to its Viking origins. You can get online and get tourist information at **Strath Ullie Crafts & Information Centre** (☎ 821402; The Harbour, Shore St; 🕐 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar).

Timespan Heritage Centre (☎ 821327; Dunrobin St; adult/child £4/2; 🕐 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct) covers local history including the 1869 Strath of Kildonan gold rush, art exhibitions and Dame Barbara Cartland, the late queen of romance novels, who lived locally.

Overlooking the town, the **Emigrants statue** is a memorial to the Clearances and the resulting diaspora of Scots around the world. Some dismiss it as a photo opportunity (with the sea-and-heather backdrop it's a good one) but the statue of a kilted man and his family is certainly anatomically accurate and does answer the 'What's worn under the kilt?' question.

There are several B&Bs in town, but for something special the historic **Bridge Hotel** (☎ 821100; www.bridgehotel.net; Dunrobin St; s £65-75, d £95-105) has plush rooms decked out in rich red bedspreads and deluxe baths. Vegetarians will blink at the collection of deer antlers in the stairway, but downstairs has a humming bar and a restaurant (meals £8 to £12) that wouldn't be out of place among Edinburgh's slicker eateries (except here there's country hospitality).

Bunks are available at **Helmsdale SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1124; www.syha.org.uk; Stafford St; dm £9.50; 🕐 May-Sep), a basic set-up with a 12-bed dorm and massive dining room.

THE HIGHLAND CLEARANCES

In the wake of Culloden, King George II introduced land laws that made clan chiefs owners of lands, which traditionally had been let virtually for free to clan members. Lured by the prospect of wealth, some lairds decided that sheep would be more profitable than agriculture, and proceeded to evict tens of thousands of farmers.

The Clearances forced these desperate folk to emigrate – to the Americas or elsewhere – or head for the cities in the hope of finding work. Those who chose to pursue farming were marginalised into whatever narrow or barren bits of land they could subsist on; this became known as crofting. It was always precarious, as crofters only had year-long rents and could lose not only the farm but also the homes they'd built.

With the economic depression of the late 19th century, many couldn't pay their rent. This time, however, they resisted expulsion, instead forming the Highland Land Reform Association and their own political party. Their resistance led to several of their demands being acceded to by the government, including security of tenure, fair rents and eventually the supply of land for new crofts.

Crofters now have the right to purchase their farming land and recent laws have abolished the feudal system which created so much misery.

If you've ever wondered what romance novelists have for tea, pop into **La Mirage** (☎ 821625; 7 Dunrobin St; snacks £1.50-3, mains £6-13; 🕐 noon-8.45pm), where Barbara Cartland dined in flamboyant pink ambience; there's always a show tune playing. The meals are mostly variations on fish suppers, but it's campy fun to look at the faded star photos and wonder what Paul McCartney must have done to be banished behind a pot plant.

Helmsdale to Wick

This route boasts several Celtic sites. From Latheron, follow the A9 to Achavanich, wedged between Loch Rangag and Loch Stemster, then double back on the road to Lybster to the 40 or so **Achavanich Standing Stones**.

Just beyond Lybster, a turn-off leads to the **Grey Cairns of Camster**, 5 miles north of the A99. Dating from between 4000 BC and 2500 BC, the burial chambers are hidden in long, low mounds rising from an evocatively desolate stretch of moor. You can enter the main chamber but you must crawl into the well-preserved **Round Cairn**.

The **Hill o'Many Stanes**, just beyond the Camster turn-off, is a curious, fan-shaped arrangement of 22 rows of small stones probably dating from around 2000 BC. Nearer to Wick at Ulbster, the **Cairn o'Get** is 400m off the A99, and then a 2-mile walk. Steps lead down to a small, picturesque harbour, directly opposite the Cairn o'Get.

Wick

☎ 01955 / pop 7333

More gritty than pretty, Wick has been down on its luck since the collapse of the herring industry. It was once the world's largest fish port for the 'silver darlings', but when the market dropped off after WWII, job losses in Wick were huge and the town has never really recovered.

Much of this story is traced at **Wick Heritage Museum** (☎ 605393; 18-27 Bank Row; adult/child £2/50p; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, call for hours Oct-Apr), from the heyday of the 19th century to some uninspiring fishing tackle.

It's enough to turn you to drink and why not? With a tour of **Old Pulteney** (☎ 602371; www.oldpulteney.com; Huddart St; adult £3.50; 🕐 tours 11am & 2pm Mon-Sat), the most northerly distillery on mainland Scotland, you get a dram of this light, earthy whisky.

At the time of research, Wick was also vying for the record for the world's shortest street, with Ebenezer Pl (just between Union and River Sts) fighting for the title.

Wick is a transport hub for the surrounding area. **Logan Air** (☎ 602294; www.loganair.co.uk) flies between Edinburgh and Wick airport (return from £70, one hour, one daily Monday to Saturday) and on to the Shetland Islands. **Eastern Airways** (☎ 01652-680600; www.easternairways.com) flies to Aberdeen (return £135, 35 minutes, four daily).

Scottish Citylink operates buses to/from Inverness (£11, three hours, four daily) and Thurso (£2.50, 40 minutes, four daily).

WORTH THE TRIP: CASTLE OF MEY

This former residence of the Queen Mother is more a home than a **castle** (☎ 851473; www.castleofmey.org.uk; adult/child £7/free; ⏰ 10.30am-4pm Sat-Thu May-Jul & mid-Aug–Sep). The exterior may seem grand, but inside it feels domestic and everything is imbued with the character of the late Queen Mum: from a surprisingly casual lounge area with a TV showing her favourite shows (*Dad's Army,* since you asked) to a photo of the king in 1943 that's lovingly inscribed 'Bertie'. A real highlight is the collection of tacky gifts that visitors would bring back from excursions into the area's tourist shops to coax that famous smile, including a hidden Loch Ness Monster that was part of a prank. All the in-jokes are explained by staff who worked for the lady. As a homy little palace, it's popular with older visitors and a real antidote to the forbidding ruins or roped-off pomposity of other castles.

Rapsons/Highland Country runs connecting services to John o'Groats (40 minutes, up to five daily Monday to Saturday) for the passenger ferry to Burwick, Orkney.

Trains service Wick from Inverness (£14, four hours, one or two daily).

John o'Groats & Around

☎ 01955 / pop 512

This ferry port to Orkney will test your optimism. It once claimed the pseudo-superlative 'Britain's most northerly mainland point' and a gaggle of tourist shops appeared to prove it…except that gong actually goes to Dunnet Head. So John o'Groats' new claim to fame is that its car park is surrounded by probably the highest concentration of plastic Nessies and thistle tea towels anywhere in the world. It also serves as the conclusion of the 874-mile trek from Land's End in Cornwall, though few cyclists or walkers pay to get a photo taken next to the fenced-in signpost that tells them how far they've just travelled.

Fortunately **North Coast Marine Adventures** (☎ 611797; www.north-coast-marine-adventures.co.uk; adult £15) can speed you away on its boat tours which rocket around the **Island of Stroma** to spot seals and puffins and shipwrecks. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 611373; ⏰ 9am-6pm Easter-Oct) beside the car park. A more scenic alternative is to continue on to **Duncansby Head**, where a 15-minute walk through a sheep paddock yields spectacular views of the sea-surrounded monoliths known as **Duncansby Stacks** and, if you're lucky, nesting guillemots.

Rapsons/Highland Country (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) runs services to/from Thurso (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday).

See p921 for details of the passenger ferry to Orkney, and the car ferry 3 miles west of here in Gills Bay.

Dunnet Head

A stretch of narrow road across a bog takes you to the most northerly point on the British mainland, the dramatic Dunnet Head, which banishes tacky pretenders with its majestic cliffs overlooking Pentland Firth. It's marked by a lighthouse built by Robert Stevenson (grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson) that dates from 1832.

NORTH & WEST COAST

This rugged coastline is some of the mainland's most isolated territory with fjordlike inlets, soaring mountains, and mirrorlike lochs festooned with waterlilies. The landscape here is the strong silent type, with brooding cliffs and lonely beaches. The occasional towns are a welcome relief from the imposing scenery.

After descending the mountainscape of the Assynt, the road emerges at the charming harbour village of Ullapool, an endearing port where you can hop on a ferry to the Outer Hebrides.

Banks and petrol stations are few and far between, so check your funds and fuel before setting out.

Getting Around

Public transport in the northwest is very patchy. Getting to Thurso or Kyle of Lochalsh by bus or train is easy, but it can be difficult to follow the coast between these places. Bus services are infrequent, and on a Sunday you'll go nowhere at all. Postbuses and Rapsons/Highland Country services run along the north coast. The alternative is to come north from Inverness via Lairg. There are trains daily to Lairg, from where postbus 104 and 105 run north to Durness. There are frequent Rapsons/Highland Country and Citylink buses between Inverness and Ullapool.

Off the main routes, renting a car is a better option. Hitching is widely practised, and as easy as you'll ever find it (for more on hitching see p971).

THURSO & SCRABSTER

☎ 01847 / pop 7737

Britain's most northerly mainland town, Thurso is an unexceptional spot that makes a handy overnight stop if you're heading west or on your way to Orkney. There are some good accommodation choices and down-to-earth people keen for a chat, but the area's beaches are marred for many visitors by the local nuclear power plant (see p900).

There's first-rate **surfing** on the nearby coast, particularly on the eastern side of town, directly in front of Lord Caithness' castle and Brimms Ness. Freezing cold water means you'll need to pack a drysuit. For more on surfing see p92.

Ferries cross from the port of Scrabster, on the outskirts of Thurso, to Orkney.

Information

Library (Davidsons Lane; ⏰ 10am-6pm Mon & Wed, 10am-8pm Tue & Fri, 10am-1pm Thu & Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 892371; Riverside Rd; ⏰ Mon-Sat Apr & May, daily Jun-Oct)

Sleeping

Sandra's Backpackers Hostel (☎ 894575; www.sandras-backpackers.ukf.net; 24 Princes St; dm £9-14, d £28; 💻) This spot is almost too good to be a backpackers, with free internet, videos and showers in all rooms. The cheaper rooms are in the basic, new bunkhouse (10 bunks to the room), but all guests get freebies including the help-yourself cereal and bikes (nonguests £6).

Holborn Hotel (☎ 892771; 16 Princess St; s/d £33/66) Having rescued the pub downstairs and turned it into a slick bar and restaurant, the new owners have turned their attention to the rooms upstairs to create plain but spick décor. It's close to the centre of town, but you might not wander much further than downstairs for a bite (see right).

Station Hotel (☎ 892003; www.stationthurso.co.uk; 54 Princess St; s/d/apt £40/70/80) This modern place comes with some nice touches like a small video collection, and other facilities. For longer stays the self-catering apartments, with excellent kitchens, are ideal.

Other recommendations:

Orcadia Guest House (☎ 894395; 27 Olrig St; s/d £20/40) An old budget favourite. The foyer is so crammed with period pieces, the rooms seem refreshingly plain.

Pentland Hotel (☎ 893202; www.pentlandhotel.co.uk; Princes St; s/d £41/75) A massive spot with decent rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Bookshop Café (☎ 893344; 10 Olrig St; light meals £4-6; ⏰ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Upstairs from the newsagent, this is the perfect place to imbibe a coffee while you browse or people-watch from the window that looks out onto the street. Meals are light and include wraps and salads, but save room for the yummy cheesecake.

Le Bistro (☎ 893737; 12 Traill St; lunch £4-6, dinner mains £9-12; ⏰ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This romantic bistro serves tasty tucker, from coffee and snacks to ambitious main meals that combine local and international flavours. The daily blackboard chalks up good local seafood, but flavour-packed haggis parcels are always a good bet.

Holborn Hotel (☎ 892771; 16 Princess St; meals £7-9) This hip restaurant serves up brilliant food including monkfish tagliatelle and prawn bisque. The outdoor area is perfect for the fleeting warm weather, but inside is a snazzy bar at which to swill cocktails.

Getting There & Around

Scottish Citylink runs buses from Inverness (£13, 3½ hours, four or five daily) to Thurso, via Wick. Rapsons/Highland Country operates a service to Wick (45 minutes, hourly) and John o'Groats (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday).

There are train services from Inverness (£13.50, 3½ hours, two to three daily), but space for bicycles is limited so book ahead.

It's a 2-mile walk from Thurso train station to the ferry port at Scrabster, or there are buses from Olrig St (80p). **Wheels Cycle Shop** (☎ 896124; 35 High St; 1-day hire £8) rents out mountain bikes and **Sandra's Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 894575; www.sandras-backpackers.ukf.net; 24 Princes St; 1-day rental £6) has regular two-wheelers.

WEST FROM THURSO

Leaving Thurso, the road snakes through the heather-patched hills and dramatic cliffs of the north coast to Durness. From here and beyond Durness the road alternates between a single and double carriageway, much loved by both motorcyclists and sheep; you should drive carefully and allow speed demons to pass.

Around 10 miles west of Thurso is the **Dounreay nuclear power station**, which was the first in the world to supply mains electricity and is currently being decommissioned. The clean-up is going speedily, planned to be finished by 2033, with only the odd particle (fragment of reprocessed reactor fuel) washing up on nearby beaches. Dounreay's **visitors centre** (☎ 01847-802572; admission free; 🕑 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) pumps out propaganda about the benefits of nuclear power.

Bettyhill is a crofting community named after the countess of Sutherland, who brutally evicted her tenants from Strathnaver so she could graze more sheep, then resettled the tenants here. Its **tourist office** (☎ 01641-521342; 🕑 Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, plus Sun Jun-Aug) has a small café (mains £6) that does simple food, if you need a rest break from the narrow roads. **Strathnaver Museum** (☎ 01641-521418; adult £1.90; 🕑 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct), in an old church nearby, tells the sad story of the Strathnaver Clearances and the Mackay clan. There's an 8th-century Pictish cross in the graveyard.

The wonderful beach at **Coldbackie** is overlooked by the **Watch Hill viewpoint**. Two miles further on is **Tongue**, overlooked by the 14th-century ruins of **Castle Varrich**. You can stay nearby at **Ben Loyal Hotel** (☎ 611216; www.benloyal.co.uk; s/d from £35/60), which has great rooms with views and filling meals that use the best local produce (mains £7 to £12, open for lunch and dinner). By the causeway, **Tongue SYHA** (☎ 0870 004 1153; www.syha.org.uk; dm £12.50; 🕑 Mar-Sep) is fitted out for budget comfort in a spectacular location right by the **Kyle of Tongue** (a kyle is a strait).

From Tongue it's 30 miles to Durness – you can take the causeway across the Kyle of Tongue or the beautiful old road that climbs up to the head of the kyle. The road crosses a desolate moor to the northern end of **Loch Hope**. Beyond Loch Hope, **Heilam** has stunning views out over **Loch Eriboll**, Britain's deepest sea inlet.

DURNESS

☎ 01971 / pop 353

If you think Scottish beaches are an oxymoron then the pristine stretches of sand around Durness will make you think again. The scattered village of Durness is strung out along sea cliffs which rise from a series of beaches.

The **tourist office** (☎ 511259; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-1.30pm daily Nov-Mar) has plenty of information on the surrounding area.

Sights

A path leads down to gaping **Smoo Cave**, a vast cave at the end of an inlet *(geo)*, and after heavy rains a river cascades through its roof, then flows out to sea. There's evidence the cave was inhabited around 6000 years ago. At low tide you can walk in, otherwise take a **boat trip** (adult/child £3/1.50) into the floodlit cave. John Lennon spent childhood days around Durness as his aunt lived here and he last came here with Yoko Ono in 1969. The **memorial** here uses lyrics from 'In My Life', which was about the Beatles' time in Durness.

Durness has several beautiful **beaches**, including Rispond to the east, Sargo Sands below town, and Balnakeil to the west; the sea offers some superb **scuba-diving** sites complete with wrecks, caves, seals and whales. At **Balnakeil**, which is less than a mile beyond Durness, a ramshackle craft village occupies what was once an early-warning radar station. A walk along the beach to the north leads to **Faraid Head**, where you can see puffin colonies in early summer.

Sleeping & Eating

Unless otherwise specified all these accommodation options are in Durness.

Sango Sands Caravan Park (☎ 511262; tent sites per person £4.25; 🕑 Apr-Oct) You couldn't imagine a better location for a camp site: great grassy areas on the edge of cliffs descend to two lovely sand beaches. Facilities are pretty good, although management can be surly.

Durness SYHA (☎ 0870 004 1113; dm £12.50) These two barracklike buildings are large bunkhouses with a curious décor, from sea-themed stencils to Dungeons & Dragons–style buxom wenches to portraits of Steptoe and Son. The rooms are comfy enough and the small kitchen and lounge are cosy in grim weather.

Mackay's Hotel (☎ 511202; www.visitmackays.com; s/d from £45/90; 🕑 Mar-Oct) This swanky hotel has six exclusive rooms; book well in advance. Exposed timber floorboards with large luscious beds make it a good spot for a romantic getaway, while the restaurant (meals £8 to £13) serves up local crab and lobster that always impresses.

Loch Croispol Bookshop (☎ 511777; 17c Balnakeil Craft Village; light meals £3-6; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; ♿) A mile west of Balnakeil, this congenial bookshop is a good spot for a browse and a brew. Lunches and snacks are yummy; salads recommended.

WORTH THE TRIP: CAPE WRATH

The most northwesterly point of the mainland, Cape Wrath is crowned by a daunting lighthouse and stands close to the sea-bird colonies on **Clo Mor Cliffs**, the mainland's highest coastal cliffs. Getting to Cape Wrath involves a **ferry** (☎ 01971-511376) ride across the Kyle of Durness (return £4.30, two hours) and connecting with a **minibus** (☎ 01971-511287) for the 11 miles to the cape (return £7, one way 40 minutes). Contact the ferry office before setting out to make sure the ferry is running.

South of Cape Wrath, **Sandwood Bay** boasts one of Britain's most isolated beaches. It's about 4.5 miles north of the end of a track from Blairmore (approach from Kinlochbervie), or you could walk south from the cape (allow eight hours) and on to Blairmore.

DURNESS TO ULLAPOOL

It's worth detouring from the 69-mile Durness to Ullapool trip, as every glance out the window is postcard perfect with green hills and awesome sea aspects. Again the A894 has some hair-raisingly narrow stretches so take it easy and use the passing places.

Kylesku is the first sizable town as you head south, where a snaking bridge heads over Lochs Glencoul and Glendhu. Cruises on steely-blue Glencoul pass treacherous-looking mountains, seal colonies and the 213m-drop of **Eas a'Chual Aulin**, Britain's highest waterfall. In summer **MV Statesman** (☎ 01971-502345; 2hr cruise adult/child £12.50/5) departs from the Kylesku Old Ferry Pier (11am and 3pm Sunday to Thursday).

For a pint and a plateful of seafood, the **Kylesku Hotel** (☎ 01971-502231; s/d from £45/70) serves up superior meals (bar meals £4 to £11; open lunch and dinner) in a pierside location. Rooms are clean and reasonably priced.

There's a picturesque 30-mile detour off the A894 to **Point of Stoer** and **Rhu Stoer Lighthouse**. The coast road is another difficult road (single-car width), but it's rewarded with spectacular views, pretty villages and excellent beaches. From the lighthouse, a one-hour cliff walk leads to the **Old Man of Stoer**, a spectacular sea stack. There are more good beaches between Stoer and Lochinver, and the **Achmelvich Beach SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1102; www.syha.org.uk; Achmelvich; dm £12; 🕑 Apr-Sep) is beside a beautiful stretch of white sand. Facilities are simple and the nearest shop is 4 miles south in Lochinver, so bring your own supplies. The Lochinver–Drumbeg postbus will drop you 1.5 miles away.

Lochinver & Around

☎ 01571 / pop 639

The spectacular scenery eases into a sheltered bay that holds the bustling fishing port of Lochinver. The **tourist office** (☎ 844330; Main St; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) supplies fishing permits and walking maps for the nearby **Hills of Assynt**, popular with walkers. The brochure *Making More of Assynt* (£2) details walks in the area.

There are several B&Bs in town, but **Albannach** (☎ 844407; www.thealbannach.co.uk; d from £110; 🕑 Mar-Nov) is the most indulgent, with awe-inspiring water views and spacious rooms. Dinner is included, but even if you're not staying you might want to drop in for the organic ingredients and well-selected local produce (dinner £45). For something more affordable, **Ardglas** (☎ 844257; www.ardglas.co.uk; Inver, Lochinver; s/d with shared bathrooms £19/38) has recently renovated rooms; magnificent views of town more than compensate for the shared bathrooms.

Inverpolly Nature Reserve

The curious rock formations around **Knockan** are produced by older geological layers rising above younger ones. The best place to see this phenomenon is at **Inverpolly Nature Reserve**, which has the three peaks of Cul Mor (849m), Stac Pollaidh (613m) and Cul Beag (769m). There's a three-hour walk up **Stac Pollaidh** (still commonly known by its English spelling of Stac Polly) from the car park at Loch Lurgainn.

ULLAPOOL

☎ 01854 / pop 1308

Snuggling in a curl of Loch Broom, Ullapool is a serene harbour on the jagged western coast. For many it's little more than a place to wait for the ferry to Lewis, but if you wander along the water's edge you'll be charmed by wee pubs and the view of the long, slow progress of a ferry up the loch. Contrary to its modern carefree port image, Ullapool served as an eviction point during the Clearances, with thousands of Scots watching the loch recede behind them as the diaspora cast them across the world.

Information

Royal Bank of Scotland (Ladysmith St)

Tourist office (☎ 612135; ullapool@host.co.uk; Argyle St; ⏰ daily Jun-Sep, Mon-Sat Apr, May & Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Mar)

Ullapool Bookshop (☎ 612356; Quay St; ⏰ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Has a good book selection and coin-operated internet.

Ullapool Library (☎ 612543; Mill St; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm & 6-8pm Tue & Thu, closed Mon & Wed during holidays) Free internet access.

Sights & Activities

Set in a converted church built by Thomas Telford, the **Ullapool Museum & Visitor Centre** (☎ 612987; 7-8 West Argyle St; adult/child £3/50p; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat Nov-Mar; ♿) relates the history of Loch Broom through interactive displays and other exhibits.

The peak season is in July and August when the town teems with visitors heading on to the Summer Isles. **CalMac** (www.calmac.co.uk) runs day trips to the islands of Lewis and Harris; these can be remarkably good value. Inquire at the CalMac office on the harbour or check its website. **Summer Queen** (☎ 612472; www.summerqueen.co.uk; Ullapool Pier; adult/child £22/10) runs four-hour cruises (departs 10am April to September) of the Summer Isles.

Sleeping

Just by strolling along Seaforth Rd, Pulteney St and Argyle St, you can find a B&B.

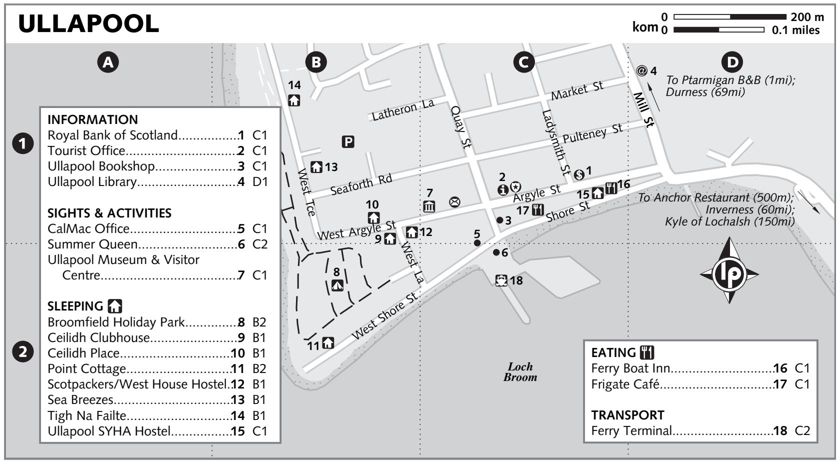
Scotpackers/West House Hostel (☎ 613126; www.scotpackers-hostels.co.uk; West Argyle St; dm £12, crofters house per person £15; 💻) Set in a rambling colourful house, it's hard to believe you're staying in a hostel with only four bunks to a room and a large lounge that includes a rainy-day video collection and a guitar. The crofters house is a good alternative for groups of up to four, with its own facilities.

Ullapool SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1156; www.syha.org.uk; Shore St; dm £12.50; ⏰ Mar-Oct) This harbourside hostel is ideally located within a stroll of all the pubs and eateries, and has a cheerful warden who takes extra care of visitors. The front rooms have harbour views but the dining area and lounge are also good spots for contemplating the water.

Ptarmigan B&B (☎ 612232; North Rd; d £36) Looking to get away from the dock and all the lollygagging tourists? This sweet spot is a mile from the centre and boasts loch views. The larger en-suite rooms are the best bets, and breakfasts here are legendary.

Point Cottage (☎ 612494; www.pointcottage.co.uk; 22 West Shore St; d £44) This intimate spot has only three double rooms with en suite, but each is lavished with friendly service and trim decoration, including dressers and sitting chairs for contemplating the view. The lovely owners offer great advice to walkers, and loan maps.

our pick **Ceilidh Place** (☎ 612103; www.theceilidhplace.com; 14 West Argyle St; d £90-130; 💻) If you're looking for a characterful place to spend a few days, this one, celebrating 'Books Music Art' (as the sign says), won't disappoint. Each luxury room comes with its own reading list (from Rabbie Burns to Julian Barnes) and is named for Scottish literati. There are plenty of indulgences, such as the guest pantry and a help-yourself kitchen. The guest lounge, resplendent in sofas and chaises-lounges, could be a bookish salon. Breakfast in the restaurant runs to fresh-baked scones and fruit. There's also regular traditional music to keep it cultural. Across the road the Ceilidh Clubhouse (West Lane; dorms £15) has simple bunkhouse-style accommodation if you want the fun but can't stretch the budget.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West Argyle St
West La
West Shore St
To Ptarmigan B&B (1mi); Durness (69mi)
To Anchor Restaurant (500m); Inverness (60mi); Kyle of Lochalsh (150mi)
Loch Broom
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Other recommendations:

Broomfield Holiday Park (☎ 612664; www.broomfieldhp.fsnet.co.uk; camp sites £8-12; ⏰ May-Oct) Great location with grassy lochside tent sites, a stone's throw from the heart of town. Take midge repellent.

Sea Breezes (☎ 612148; 2 West Tce; s/d £15/45) Good budget single room, but the best views are from the en-suite double.

Tigh Na Failte (☎ 613433; 17 West Tce; d & tw £44) A pleasant riverside spot; upstairs rooms overlook the bay.

Eating & Drinking

Frigate Cafe (☎ 612969; Shore St; mains £4-8; ⏰ 10am-5pm) Ease into a coffee at this chic waterside spot and you might find yourself spending the day watching the tide come and go. It does an excellent breakfast. Lunches include wraps, salads and daily blackboard specials.

Anchor Restaurant (☎ 612222; Garve Rd; mains £6-10; ⏰ dinner) In the Harbour Lights Hotel, this place serves up top meals at affordable prices and all with beautiful views out over the loch. You could almost make a meal with starters such as the pork terrine or the seared scallops in an orange honey and grainy mustard, but dessert (from pancakes to rice puddings) is a must.

Ferry Boat Inn (☎ 612366; www.ferryboat-inn.com; Shore St; bar meals £8-10; ⏰ bar meals all day plus dinner 6.30-9pm) The FBI, as locals call it, is worth investigating for its delightful bar, which looks out onto the pier and is perfect if you've got some time to kill before your boat departs. Meals are inventive pub fare (swap beef steak for ostrich and pepper sauce for a peppy vermouth and you get the idea). Drinking here is always fun, with a cheery crowd.

Getting There & Around

Citylink has bus services from Inverness (£7.70, 1½ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday) to Ullapool linking in with the ferry to Stornoway on Lewis.

Bikes can be rented from Scotpackers/West House Hostel for £10 per day.

ULLAPOOL TO KYLE OF LOCHALSH

The long looping road from Ullapool to Kyle of Lochalsh (turn off the A835 onto A832) seems to be much more than 50 miles, partly because you'll want to pull off the road to see more of this remote region, but also because the road itself is windy.

Just 12 miles from Ullapool and before the junction of the A835 and the A832, the **Falls of Measach** ('ugly' in Gaelic) spill 45m into the spectacularly deep and narrow Corrieshalloch Gorge. A wobbly suspension bridge provides superb views of the thundering falls, though the logging in the plantation forest nearby ruins the postcard image.

Turning off onto the A832 is a scenic option that takes in some almost-undiscovered coastline and the subtropical **Inverewe Gardens** (NTS; ☎ 01445-781200; adult/concession £7/5/25; ⏰ 9am-9.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar; ♿), which utilises Gulf Stream warmth to grow Mediterranean and Japanese plants, among others. The café provides a good pit stop and has great cakes.

Alternatively you can head inland on the A835 (towards Inverness) and catch up with the A832 further down, which can save an hour on the journey.

Gairloch

☎ 01445 / pop 1061

The A832 weaves between lochs into Gairloch, a peaceful group of villages scattered along the inner end of a loch. It's popular in summer with lots of places to stay. The surrounding area is known for sandy beaches and good fishing. Hill walkers use the town as a base for the nearby Torridon hills. The **tourist office** (☎ 712130; Auchtercairn; ⏰ daily Easter-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) has a bureau de change. **Gairloch Heritage Museum** (☎ 712287; www.gairlochheritagemuseum.org.uk; Auchtercairn; adult/child £3/50p; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Mar-Sep, 10am-1pm Mon-Sat Oct) tells of life in the western Highlands and includes a typical crofting cottage.

The **Old Inn** (☎ 712006; www.theoldinn.co.uk; s/d £40/90) is a historic coaching inn nestled by the river by a lovely old bridge, making the beer garden an ideal spot for a scenic ale or malt. Rooms here are cosy with dark-wood furniture and some have four-post beds. Bar meals use local seafood to great effect (mains £6 to £13).

Away from the coast, Strath can be a good spot to stay in the busier summer months. **Wayside Guest House** (☎ 712008; Strath; s/d £25/40) is a central B&B with water views from both its pleasant rooms, which share a bathroom.

Kinlochewe to Torridon

Tiny Kinlochewe is usually used as a base for outdoor activities. From here the road follows Glen Torridon, an unforgettable journey along a river overlooked by the rugged peaks of Beinn Eighe (1010m) and Liathach (1055m). The road meets the sea at Torridon, where the small **Torridon Countryside Centre** (NTS; ☎ 01445-791221; donation adult/child £3/2; 🕐 10am-6pm May-Sep; ♿) offers displays on the area's flora and fauna, including a short audiovisual display and, in another building down the road, a deer museum.

If you're looking to stay in the lap of luxury, **Loch Torridon Country House Hotel** (☎ 01445-791242; www.lochtorridonhotel.com; standard s/d from £100/200; 🕐 Feb-Dec; 💻 ♿) is a lavish Victorian shooting lodge that has an enviable lochside position overlooking the peaks, with Liathach looming impossibly large opposite. Even the standard rooms are swish, but pricier master rooms will make you feel like you've got your own country estate. Friendly staff can organise any number of activities on land or water.

At the other end of the scale, **Torridon Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1154; Torridon; dm adult/child £13/10; 🕐 Mar-Oct) is a homely building in a magnificent location near the Countryside Centre, and is used mainly by outdoor enthusiasts.

Plockton

☎ 01599 / pop 378

Made famous as a location for the TV series *Hamish Macbeth,* this seaside village is so endearing it's almost unbelievable. The main street, lined with palm trees and whitewashed houses, could almost be a film set – but for the large numbers of over-55 extras who tour-bus in here. You can always look out on the harbour view: a small, protected bay speckled with islets and hemmed in by vast, green-fuzzed mountains.

Calum's Seal Trips (☎ 544306; www.calums-sealtrips.com; adult/child £6/4) can get you out onto the water, where seals swarm just outside the harbour.

SLEEPING & EATING

Plockton Station Bunkhouse (☎ 544235; mickcoe@btinternet.com; Nessun Dorma; dm £10; Ⓟ) This former train station is a well-fitted-out hostel that limits the beds to four per dorm. The kitchen-cum-lounge is an airy spot to enjoy a read as you ponder the scenery.

Shieling (☎ 544282; www.lochalsh.net/shieling; r per person £25; 🕐 Easter-Oct) Slap-bang by the sea, this characterful B&B has two carpeted rooms with big beds that make it a popular romantic weekender. The expertly trimmed garden features a thatched blackhouse that will make you glad of the warm rooms.

Plockton Hotel (☎ 544274; www.plocktonhotel.co.uk; Harbour St; s/d £55/90, cottages per person £30) This dark-stone hotel is one of the town's best places to bunk down and brew up. The waterfront views give the large rooms an excellent aspect. While the cottage isn't as well placed, it's just as comfy (and more affordable). Even if you don't stay, pull up a seat in the beer garden and you could easily drink an afternoon away. If dinner comes around, you can order up fresh lobsters that are better than the usual pub nosh.

Shores Buttery (☎ 544263; Harbour St; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This is the spot for seaside snacks as you watch the water. There are plenty of paninis, ciabattas and wraps, but with a uniquely Scottish ocean view this is the place to try cullen skink, the creamy haddock soup.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Plockton is 6 miles north of Kyle of Lochalsh. The two are connected by a postbus that runs once daily Monday to Saturday, and by trains (15 minutes). You can explore the town's surrounds with a bike from **Plockton Cycle Hire** (☎ 544255; Plockton Cottages, Frithard Rd; half-/full day £8/12; 🕐 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

KYLE OF LOCHALSH

☎ 01599 / pop 739

Before the controversial bridge, Kyle of Lochalsh was the main ferry port to Skye. Visitors buzz through the town, preferring to stay in Skye or nearby Plockton, though they miss out on Scotland's best decorated public toilets, which include a small collection of whisky bottles – it's a real must-pee.

The **tourist office** (☎ 534276; 🕐 Apr-Oct) is beside the seafront car park.

Kyle can be reached by bus from Inverness (£12, 2½ hours, two daily), and by direct Citylink buses from Glasgow (£22, five to six hours, three daily), which continue on to Skye.

The train between Inverness and Kyle of Lochalsh (£16, 2½ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) is one of Scotland's most scenic trips.

AROUND KYLE OF LOCHALSH

Eilean Donan Castle

The oft-photographed **Eilean Donan Castle** (☎ 01599-555202; www.eileandonancastle.com; Dornie; adult/child £4.75/1.50; 🕐 10am-5.30pm mid-Mar–Nov, call for winter hours) is one of Scotland's most evocative castles. Inside there's a historical re-creation exhibit as well as stills from the movie *Highlander* (in which the castle almost out-acted Sir Sean Connery) and a sword wielded at the Battle of Culloden.

The castle was trashed in response to the Jacobite uprising in 1719 and took 20 years to rebuild in the early 20th century.

ROAD TO THE ISLES

The 46 miles from Fort William via Glenfinnan to Arisaig and Mallaig is known as the 'Road to the Isles' (the A830), but it's really a highway to heaven as you'll exhaust all your wows on this spectacular countryside. Along this road Bonnie Prince Charlie got his first and last glimpses of Scotland as he arrived full of hope in 1745 and left defeated the following year.

At Glenfinnan you'll find the **Glenfinnan Monument** (NTS; ☎ 01397-722250), a kilted highlander erected in 1815 to commemorate the Jacobite cause. **Glenfinnan Visitor Centre** (☎ 722250; adult/child £3/2; 🕐 9.30am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov; ♿) recounts how the Young Pretender raised his standard here to rally the clans to his campaign to be king. Things then went tragically wrong, forcing the would-be king to flee. You can imagine the bagpipes calling the clans to the cause as you observe the lookout tower's fine views of Loch Shiel. Nearby, the famous 21-arch **Glenfinnan Viaduct** will be familiar to Harry-heads as it featured in *Harry Potter & the Chamber of Secrets;* a mile-long walk leads to an ideal viewpoint for the viaduct.

From **Arisaig**, the **MV Sheerwater** (☎ 01687-450224; www.arisaig.co.uk; 🕐 May-Sep) runs day trips for foot passengers to the islands of Rum (return £20, 2½ hours, two or three a week), Eigg (return £15, one hour, six a week) and Muck (return £16, two hours, three a week), as well as wildlife cruises. From Arisaig the road winds around attractive bays and some of the country's most beautiful beaches known as the **Silver Sands of Morar**. **Morar village** is at the entrance to **Loch Morar**, Britain's deepest body of fresh water. It's said to contain its own monster, named Morag, giving hope to disillusioned Nessie hunters.

Alternatively you can let someone else do the driving and watch the scenery with the Jacobite steam train (see right).

Mallaig

☎ 01687 / pop 797

Travellers to the Isle of Skye or the Small Isles stay overnight in this bustling fishing village, but there's nothing to keep tourists here longer. There's a **tourist office** (🕐 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-3.45pm Sat, 1.45-3.45pm Sun) with internet access.

Sheena's Backpackers Lodge (☎ 462764; Harbour View; dm £11) is upstairs from the Tea Garden and the two businesses can clash (loud music at night carries upstairs and backpackers wander through the dining room). Still it's a friendly spot in the centre, and close enough for an early ferry.

Near the tourist office, the four-bedroom **Moorings Guest House** (☎ 462225; mooringsguesthouse@talk21.com; East Bay; s/d £25/44) has views over the harbour, especially from the breakfast room conservatory, which leads a double life as a tearoom from Easter to September.

Shiel Buses (☎ 01967-431272) runs to/from Fort William (1½ hours, one daily Monday to Friday).

The scenic West Highland railway line rolls between Fort William and Mallaig (£8.10, 1¼ hours, four daily) with connections from Glasgow (£23, 5¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). From May to October the **Jacobite steam train** (☎ 01463-239026; www.steamtrain.info; adult/child day-return £27/15.50) runs from Fort William to Mallaig with a stop in Glenfinnan.

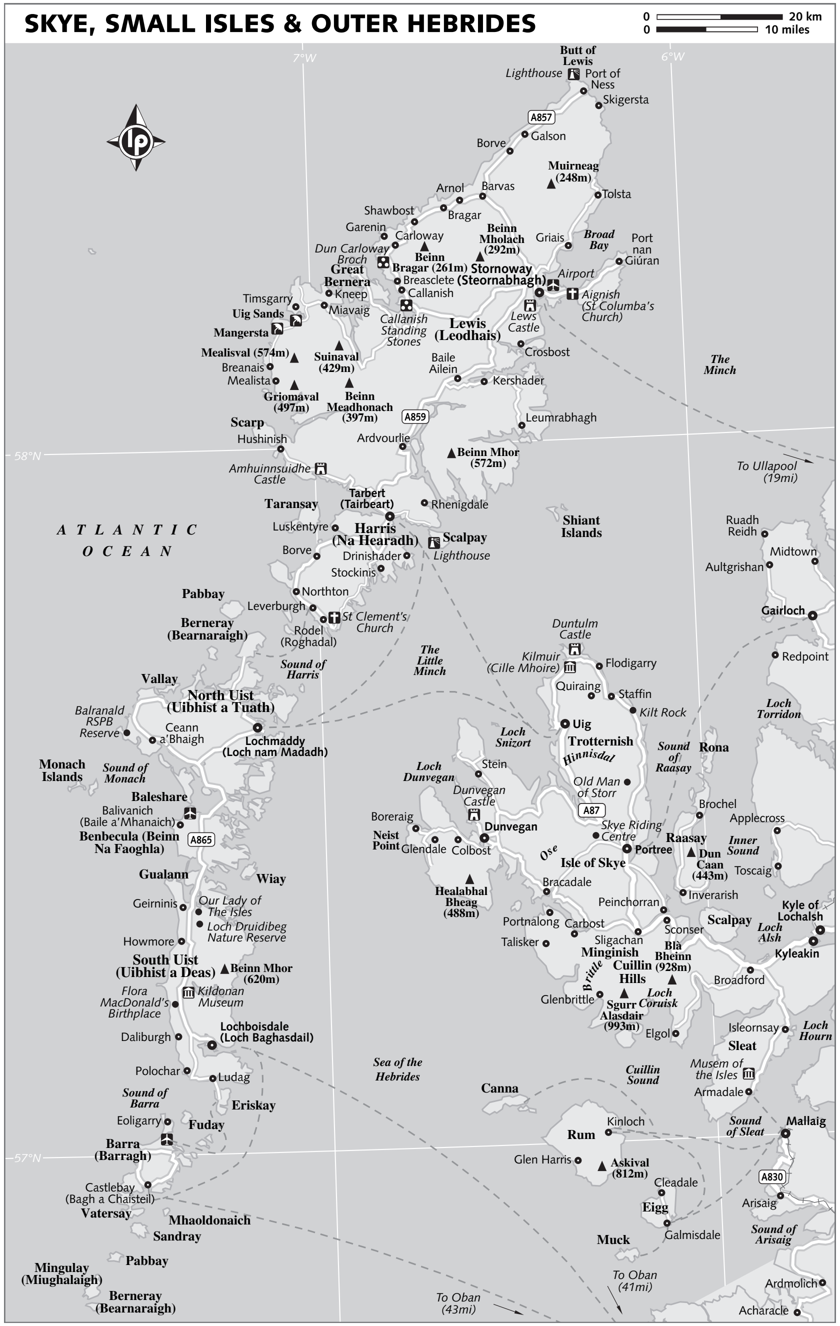
CalMac operates ferries from Mallaig to Armadale on Skye (per person/car single £3.05/16.90, 25 minutes, eight to nine Monday to Saturday, plus Sunday mid-May to mid-September).

ISLE OF SKYE

This romantic destination packs so much in – distillery, castle, mountain range – that it's Scotland's most visited offshore location. The rugged splendour peaks at the Cuillin Hills which are popular with walkers and climbers who are keen to bag a few more Munros.

Less energetic visitors cruise the island's castles or shelter from the drizzle in some of the inviting Skye watering holes. The island's recent popularity means that Skye is packed with gourmet food and quality boutique hotels. Don't be surprised if you spend more time indoors, as Skye's name comes from a Norse word for 'cloud'.

SKYE, SMALL ISLES & OUTER HEBRIDES


0 20 km
0 10 miles
7°W
6°W
58°N
57°N
Butt of Lewis
Lighthouse
Port of Ness
Skigersta
A857
Galson
Borve
Muirneag (248m)
Tolsta
Arnol
Barvas
Shawbost
Bragar
Garenin
Carloway
Beinn Mholach (292m)
Griais
Broad Bay
Port nan Giùran
Dun Carloway Broch
Beinn Bragar (261m)
Stornoway (Steornabhagh)
Great Bernera
Breasclete
Airport
Aignish (St Columba's Church)
Timsgarry
Kneep
Callanish
Uig Sands
Miavaig
Callanish Standing Stones
Lewis (Leodhais)
Lews Castle
Mangersta
Crosbost
Mealisval (574m)
Suinaval (429m)
Baile Ailein
Breanais
Mealista
Kershader
The Minch
Griomaval (497m)
Beinn Meadhonach (397m)
A859
Scarp
Leumrabhagh
Hushinish
Ardvourlie
Beinn Mhor (572m)
Amhuinnsuidhe Castle
To Ullapool (19mi)
Tarbert (Tairbeart)
Taransay
Rhenigdale
Ruadh Reidh
Shiant Islands
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Luskentyre
Harris (Na Hearadh)
Scalpay Lighthouse
Midtown
Borve
Drinishader
Aultgrishan
Stockinish
Pabbay
Northton
Leverburgh
St Clement's Church
Gairloch
Berneray (Bearnaraigh)
Rodel (Roghadal)
Duntulm Castle
The Little Minch
Sound of Harris
Kilmuir (Cille Mhoire)
Flodigarry
Redpoint
Vallay
Quiraing
North Uist (Uibhist a Tuath)
Staffin
Kilt Rock
Loch Torridon
Balranald RSPB Reserve
Ceann a'Bhaigh
Lochmaddy (Loch nam Madadh)
Uig
Loch Snizort
Trotternish
Hinnisdal
Sound of Raasay
Rona
Monach Islands
Sound of Monach
Stein
Loch Dunvegan
Old Man of Storr
Baleshare
Dunvegan Castle
A87
Brochel
Balivanich (Baile a'Mhanaich)
Boreraig
Dunvegan
Applecross
Benbecula (Beinn Na Faoghla)
A865
Neist Point
Glendale
Colbost
Skye Riding Centre
Raasay
Inner Sound
Ose
Portree
Dun Caan (443m)
Gualann
Wiay
Isle of Skye
Toscaig
Bracadale
Healabhal Bheag (488m)
Inverarish
Geirninis
Our Lady of The Isles
Peinchorran
Kyle of Lochalsh
Loch Druidibeg Nature Reserve
Portnalong
Carbost
Scalpay
Sconser
Loch Alsh
Howmore
Talisker
Sligachan
Kyleakin
South Uist (Uibhist a Deas)
Beinn Mhor (620m)
Minginish
Cuillin Hills
Blà Bheinn (928m)
Broadford
Flora MacDonald's Birthplace
Kildonan Museum
Brittle
Glenbrittle
Loch Coruisk
Sgurr Alasdair (993m)
Dalibrugh
Lochboisdale (Loch Baghasdail)
Elgol
Isleornsay
Loch Hourn
Sleat
Sea of the Hebrides
Polochar
Ludag
Cuillin Sound
Museum of the Isles
Sound of Barra
Eriskay
Canna
Armadale
Eoligarry
Fuday
Kinloch
Sound of Sleat
Mallaig
Barra (Barragh)
Rum
Glen Harris
Askival (812m)
A830
Cleadale
Castlebay (Bagh a Chaisteil)
Eigg
Arisaig
Vatersay
Mhaoldonaich
Galmisdale
Sound of Arisaig
Sandray
Muck
Pabbay
To Oban (41mi)
Mingulay (Miughalaigh)
Ardmolich
Berneray (Bearnaraigh)
To Oban (43mi)
Acharacle

Activities

WALKING

Skye offers some of the most challenging walking in Scotland. You should avoid more difficult walks in winter and always pack for all conditions. There are several great guidebooks for more advanced walks, but the *Traveller's Companion* and *In the Footsteps of…* series (both available free at tourist offices) both offer good easy walks; the latter based around historical themes such as Dr Johnson or the Clearances.

Skye Walking Holidays (☎ 01470-552396; www.skyewalks.co.uk; Duntulm Castle Hotel, Trotternish) organises week-long walking holidays, but individual walkers are welcome to join its guided walks for £25 a day.

CLIMBING

The Cuillin Hills are a playground for rock climbers. Traversing the Cuillin Ridge (a two-day expedition) is Britain's best mountaineering expedition. Unless you're an experienced climber, getting a guide is strongly advised. Guides charge from £80 a day:

Climb Skye (☎ 01478-640264; www.climbskye.co.uk)
Cuillin Guides (☎ 01478-640289; www.cuillin-guides.co.uk)
Skye Guides (☎ 01471-822116; www.skyeguides.co.uk)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The sheltered coves and sea lochs around Skye provide superb sea kayaking. **Whitewave Outdoor Centre** (☎ 01470-542414; www.white-wave.co.uk; Linicro, Kilmuir; 🕒 Mar-Oct) and **Skyak Adventures** (☎ 01471-833428; www.skyakadventures.com; 13 Camuscross, Isleornsay) provide kayaking instruction and equipment hire. It costs around £25 for a half-day kayak hire with instruction.

The green hills around Portree are best seen from horseback with **Skye Riding Centre** (☎ 01470-582419; www.skyeridingcentre.co.uk; A850), a small private stable 6 miles west of Portree on the road to Dunvegan.

For something different, you can try handling birds of prey or go on a 'hawk walk' with **Isle of Skye Falconry** (☎ 0780 821899; www.isleofskye-falconry.co.uk); appointments are essential.

Tours

For an insight into the island's history, take a tour with **Isle of Skye Tour Guide Co** (01471-844440; www.isle-of-skye-tour-guide.co.uk; 1hr tour from £10), which will cover most of the island's major sights.

Getting There & Away

The obvious way to arrive is via the bridge from Kyle of Lochalsh, which is now free. CalMac operates ferries from mainland Mallaig to Armadale (single per person/car £3.25/17.65, 25 minutes, eight to nine Monday to Saturday, plus Sunday mid-May to mid-September).

There's also the six-car **Skye Ferry** (☎ 01599-522273; www.skyeferry.co.uk; adult/car with 4 passengers £1/7; 🕒 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5.45pm Sun mid-May–Aug, 9am-5.45pm Mon-Sat Easter–mid-May) from Glenelg to Kylerhea.

Citylink runs direct buses between Glasgow, Portree and Uig (£25, seven hours, three daily). Buses also run from Inverness to Portree (£15, 3½ hours, twice daily).

Getting Around

Public transport dwindles to almost nothing at the weekend (it's blasphemy to even ask about Sunday buses), particularly in winter, particularly off the Portree–Kyleakin Rd.

Rapsons/Highland Country (☎ 01478-612622; www.rapsons.co.uk) operates the main bus routes on the island, linking most villages and towns. It offers a good-value Skye Roverbus ticket, giving unlimited travel for one/three days for £6/16.

PORTREE (PORT RIGH)

☎ 01478 / pop 1917

Skye's capital has two focuses: the harbour and the market square. The picturesque harbour is the ideal spot for a stroll or a cruise, while the square has facilities such as banks and the all-important pubs.

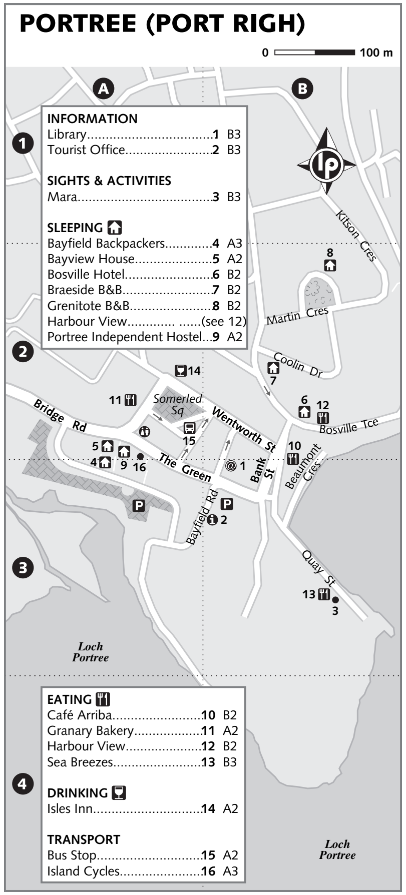
There's some debate about where the town name comes from, with many believing it's derived from the Gaelic *Port Righ* (King's Harbour), named for the 1540 call paid by James V to pacify local clan chieftains. Others speculate it comes from *Port Ruighe*, meaning port of slopes, based on Portree's hilly locale. You could ask a Gaelic-speaking local (see p909).

Information

Library (☎ 612697; Bayfield Rd; 🕒 1-8pm Mon, 10am-5pm Thu-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Free internet access.
Tourist office (☎ 612137; Bayfield Rd; 🕒 Mon-Sat Oct-Easter, daily Easter-Sep) Just south of Bridge Rd. It does foreign exchange, and there's also internet access (per 20 minutes £1).

Tours

From the pier, the **Stardust MV** (☎ 07798 743858; trips £10-12), takes tours to Raasay, Rona and Holm



Island; book at the crafts shop **Mara** (☎ 612429; www.mara-direct.com; The Pier; 🕘 10am-5pm).

Sleeping

Bayfield Backpackers (☎ 612231; Bayfield; dm £12; P 💻 ♿) Literally a stone's throw from the water, this brilliant hostel, operated by Bayview House, offers lessons in how to run a good hostel. Gleaming chrome appliances greet you in the kitchen, where there's free tea and coffee; most dorms have only four bunks, with individual lockers for all. The views out to the bay as you eat breakfast are unbeatable.

Bayview House (☎ 613340; Bayfield; s/d £17.50/35, f from £47.50; P) Finally, an affordable guesthouse that casts aside the doilies and ceramic kittens for solid, basic rooms. The functional rooms all come with en suite and are popular with outdoorsy couples who can get tips from the knowledgeable owners. Downstairs is a roomier family room that can comfortably sleep four. No breakfast makes this place cheaper – and you won't miss it with Portree on a plate at the front door.

Grenitote B&B (☎ 612808; e.a.matheson@amserve.net; 9 Martin Cres; s/d £25/40) In a quieter residential area, this cheery spot has plenty to lure you up the hill. Tastefully decorated rooms come with en suites and feel homy. The friendly owner is chatty and welcoming, like the Scottish aunt you always wanted.

Braeside B&B (☎ 612613; www.braesideportree.co.uk; Stormy Hill; d/tr £40/60) You'll know this bright spot by its flowerpots. Inside it's just as sweet, with ivy-patterned linen and a roomy residents' lounge that's good for meeting other guests. Breakfast is a treat with vegetarian options and a lot of choice. There's a good triple which is ideal for small walking groups or families.

Bosville Hotel (☎ 612846; 9-11 Bosville Tce; www.macleodshotels.co.uk/bosville; B&B d £110) From the complimentary sherry check-in sweetener to your last gourmet breakfast, everything is done with aplomb at this upmarket hotel. Split-level suites feature neutral furnishings and thoughtful touches, such as cosy slippers, armchairs and deep tubs in which to soak walk-worn muscles. The restaurant downstairs (mains £8 to £14) makes inventive use of local produce and has a subdued candle-lit ambience.

Other recommendations:

Portree Independent Hostel (☎ 613737; www.portreehostel.f9.co.uk; The Green; dm £13) A former post office that's showing its age but has four-bed dorms and a public laundrette.

Harbour View (☎ 612069; 7 Bosville Tce; s £20, d £40-50) Better known for its restaurant of the same name, there are three reliable rooms here, with an en-suite room costing a little more.

Eating & Drinking

The hotels around Somerled Sq serve up good pub food, so do a menu check and see if anything takes your fancy.

Granary Bakery (☎ 612873; Somerled Sq; light meals £1-3; 🕘 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) For a quick fresh-made roll or tasty stovie this is a good spot from which to enjoy some people-watching in the square.

Café Arriba (☎ 611830; Quay Brae; breakfast £3.95, mains £5-10; 🕘 7am-10pm) If you want to open a quality café this place is your blueprint. There are inventive sandwiches served on a range of breads, bagels and croissants; stay-awhile views; and the finest java jolt in town. With a bright, fun feel it can be popular when school finishes so grab the best booth before then.

Sea Breezes (☎ 612016; Quay St; lunch £5-7, dinner £12-18; 🕘 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) Most locals skip the chippers and go straight for this innovative restaurant when they want quality seafood. Lunches are simple: asparagus and goats' cheese tagliatelle, but dinner serves up hand-dived scallops with burnt-orange dressing and other treats.

Harbour View (☎ 612069; 7 Bosville Tce; mains £12-18; 🕘 lunch & dinner) This place has a solid reputation for seafood (the platter for two is the ideal sampler), and the intimate dining room is decorated with fishing rods and nets so you'll feel like you landed it yourself. It's good to see pheasant and venison make an appearance on the excellent menu.

Isles Inn (☎ 612129; Somerled Sq) This cheery pub is the liveliest spot in town for a drink, with folk sessions and bands on weekends. The food is unexceptional pub grub (bar meals £5 to £8, dinner mains £9 to £12) but will line the stomach if you're making a night of it. Food served from noon to 9pm.

Getting There & Around

Somerled Sq is the Portree bus stop. Citylink runs to/from Inverness (£14, 3¼ hours, two to three buses daily); Glasgow (£22, 6½ hours, three daily) via Fort William; and Edinburgh (£28.70, eight hours, two daily). Local buses leave from here: three to five daily to Sligachan (15 minutes), Broadford (35 minutes) and Dunvegan Castle (40 minutes), and six a day on the loop around Trotternish taking in Flodigarry (20 minutes) and Uig (30 minutes).

Island Cycles (☎ 613121; www.isbuc.co.uk; The Green; half-/full day £7.50/14; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) hires out bikes.

GAELIC GOLD

As you wander around Skye you'd be forgiven for thinking there are a lot of Olympians proudly wearing gold, silver and bronze badges. The badges actually indicate locals' proficiency in Gaelic, the traditional Scots and Irish language, with different colours corresponding to the wearer's ability. Gold represents fluency, and you'll see a lot of older folk wearing it, while bronze is for beginners. A few shops even sell the badges (£2), but they'll probably want to quiz you in Gaelic before they give you one.

To get in on the action you can take a Gaelic course at **Sabhal Mor Ostaig** (☎ 01471-888000; www.smo.uhi.ac.uk; 1-week intensive courses from £140), a college where the language is spoken almost exclusively.

KYLEAKIN (CAOL ACAIN)

☎ 01599 / pop 380

Poor wee Kyleakin is even more redundant now that the Skye Bridge is free, as the more miserly locals no longer park here to walk across the bridge. There's good budget accommodation when the rest of the island books up.

Dun Caan Hostel (☎ 534087; www.skyerover.co.uk; Pier Rd; dm £12), a cosy hostel attracting a more mature crowd than the other backpacker barns in town, has six-bunk dorms and serene harbour views. The common room is a floral explosion that brightens up the place and the kitchen is small but functional. The owners hire out bikes and give advice on getting into the great outdoors.

From its racy red duvets that wish you goodnight in several languages, you can tell that **Skye Independent Hostel** (☎ 534510; www.scotlands-top-hostels.co; Benmhor; caravans/chalet dm/dm/tw & d £9.50/10/12/28; 💻) is cheeky. It's also cheap, with several different options: there are dorms that have a maximum of eight bunks to a room (some have fewer) which all come with themes. The *Star Trek*–themed caravan (Captain's log: check spelling of 'Spoc' and 'Zulu') has spacey lamps but is fairly basic, while the chalet is a little tight. All guests can use the spacious garden and laid-back kitchen/dining area.

BROADFORD (AN T-ATH LEATHANN)

☎ 01471 / pop 1237

This blink-and-you'd-miss-it service centre has good accommodation options but little character. The **tourist office** (☎ 822361; 🕘 daily Apr-Oct) is near the large Esso petrol station and there's also a **Co-op supermarket** (🕘 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) which serves southern Skye.

Broadford SYHA Hostel (☎ 822442; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13.50; 🕘 Mar-Oct; P 💻) is a modern place in a quiet spot with a great outlook and good facilities. It also has neat doubles. Staff are helpful with local walks – long and short.

About 7 miles north of Broadford (between the villages of Dunan and Luib) you zoom into **Skye Picture House** (☎ 822531; www.skyepicturehouse.co.uk; Ard Dorch by Broadford; d £60), an ultracomfy spot with great views across to **Scalpay** (wide-angle lens advised). The owners are avid photographers, so photography tomes and images decorate the breakfast room. Never mind the institutional aqua corridors, because en-suite rooms feel like boutique apartments with spacious bathrooms and slickly designed décor.

You can hire a bike from **Fairwinds Cycle Hire** (☎ 822270; 1-day hire £8), on the main road.

ARMADALE (ARMADAL)

☎ 01471 / pop 9063

If you catch the ferry from Mallaig you'll arrive in remote Armadale. Near the ruins of **Armadale Castle** is the excellent **Museum of the Isles** (☎ 844305; adult/child £4.90/3.80; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct; ♿). This engrossing exhibition is like walking through an encyclopaedia of the Western Isles from early Norse raids to the disintegration of Gaelic culture and Scottish emigration. The beautiful surrounding grounds offer woodlands strolls; from the main road you can access these walks without having to pay for castle-garden admission.

To explore the sea **Sea.fari** (☎ 822361; www.seafari.co.uk; The Pier, Armadale) does brilliant whale-spotting trips around Rum, with a landing on Eigg (two/three hours £24/34).

Looking a little like a whitewashed lighthouse, the rudimentary **Armadale SYHA Hostel** (☎ 844260; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13; 🕑 Apr-Sep) is a five-minute walk from the ferry and has great water views from an expansive patio. Take your boots off though – they're strict on that here.

Recently the home of celebrated Scottish chef Lady Clare MacDonald, **Kinloch Lodge** (☎ 833214; www.claire-mcdonald.com; off A851, Sleat; s £95-130, d £190-260) is a stately foodie treat (dinner £42). Rooms have an elegant country-house feel with bird watercolours on the wall and plump beds. The drawing room has a selection of whisky and cigars, so you can swig, puff and contemplate the view. It's 10 miles north of Armadale, just 5 miles before the turn-off to the A87.

CUILLIN HILLS & MINGINISH PENINSULA

☎ 01478

Rising to the west of Broadford, the Cuillin Hills are Britain's most impressive mountain range. Their jagged peaks and ridges could be a serrated knife sawing at the grey sky; climbers and walkers see them as *the* challenge in Scotland. The highest summit, **Sgurr Alasdair** (993m), is one of the biggest trophies for experienced mountaineers, but is off limits for most walkers. An easier day-walk is the steep climb from Glenbrittle camp site to **Coire Lagan** (6 miles round-trip; allow at least three hours), an impressive spot known for **rock climbing**.

You'll know the crossroads at **Sligachan** (Sligeachan) by the gaggle of tripods that gather at this oft-photographed jumping-off point for the Cuillins. This spectacular spot is dwarfed by the mighty hills, but to settle your nerves grab a drink or meal at **Sligachan Hotel** (☎ 650204; www.sligachan.co.uk; bar meals £6-10, mains £10-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner until 11pm; Ⓟ 💻 ♿), a cheery, barnlike bar with enough malts and real ales to warm any wind-blown walker. The slightly over-priced bar meals include curries, roasts and limited vegetarian (feel like cheese and macaroni again?), but the beer garden and playground out the front are the ideal spots for some pint-in-hand parenting. The more formal restaurant has more creative meals, and there are classy, if faded, rooms (dorms £10 to £12, single/double £63/96). The nearby basic **camp site** (☎ 07786-435294; tent sites per person £4; 🕑 Easter-Oct) is recognisable by the campers drying out their tents in the car park.

You can sample the excellent sweetish, peaty and powerful single malt, once favoured by Robert Louis Stevenson, when you take the 45-minute tour of Carbost's **Talisker Distillery** (☎ 614308; adult/child £5/free; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 2-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) that's been operating since 1830.

DUNVEGAN & AROUND

☎ 01470

On the island's western side is the stronghold of the MacLeods, **Dunvegan Castle** (☎ 521206; adult/child £7/4, gardens only £5/3, seal trips £6/3.50; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar). Since the 13th century, this fortification has held this site – many believe because it holds the **Fairy Flag**, a silken relic brought from the Middle East by the Crusaders and purporting to bring victory to the clan that holds it. Other objects here include souvenirs of visitors such as Bonnie Prince Charlie and Dr Johnson. To really get your money's worth from the steep admission fee, however, make time to enjoy the vast and lovely gardens.

To stay in Dunvegan, try **Tables Hotel** (☎ 521 404; www.tables-hotel.co.uk; s/d/tr £45/86/120; Ⓟ), a family-run place with a conservatory breakfast that includes black or white pudding, smoked haddock and vegetarian options. The relaxed lounge includes a DVD player and plush sofas, plus there's a telescope that's used to give free tours of the Skye sky.

The best meals in town are at the **Old School** (☎ 521421; meals £8.50-19; 🕑 dinner), a candlelit eatery bubbling with conversation, where the menu runs to peppers stuffed with dhal and tipsy duck soused in Drambuie.

Five miles from Dunvegan, on the road to Glendale, **Three Chimneys** (☎ 511258; www.threechimneys.co.uk; 2-course lunch £17.50, 3-course dinner £42; 🕑 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) is one of Scotland's premier restaurants with rooms. Inspired seafood is a speciality with dishes such as crab tortellini or grilled cod with squid risotto, but game also regularly features on the menu. Rooms in the **House Over-By** (d £250), the Three Chimney's megastar accommodation, are luxury-packed and include a modest CD and DVD library, huge king beds and stunning views west to the Outer Hebrides. Clearly, breakfasts are gourmet with fresh-baked croissants and exotic fruits.

From Monday to Saturday, there are three to five bus services from Portree to Dunvegan Castle. Postbuses also run this route.

TROTTERNISH PENINSULA

☎ 01470

North of Portree, Skye's coastal scenery opens up into the magical Trotternish Peninsula. Look out for the rocky spike of the **Old Man of Storr**, a terrace of basalt splayed out to look like the Scottish gent's garment at **Kilt Rock** and the ruins of **Duntulm Castle**. At Staffin Bay the dramatic escarpment of the **Quiraing** will catch your eye.

The tiny hamlet of **Flodigarry** (Flodaigearraidh) has a couple of excellent places to stay. The **Flodigarry Country House Hotel** (☎ 552203; www.flodigarry.co.uk; s/d £65/130, cottages £100; Ⓟ ♿) is an upper-end hotel that lets you stay in the restored cottage of Flora MacDonald. Rooms in the hotel marry heritage with comfort and feature four-post beds, beautiful textured wallpaper and a complimentary whisky or sherry. The famous cottage is more basic (Flora was a woman of simple means after all) with an unattached bathroom downstairs and small twin upstairs. The restaurant (meals £9 to £12; meals served from noon to 9.30pm) does treats such as salmon stuffed with crabmeat, and herb-crusted lamb, while the bar is a scenic spot for a dram.

About 100m from Flodigarry Country House Hotel but a million miles away in budget, the **Dun Flodigarry Hostel** (☎ 552212; hostel.flodigarry@btinternet.com; dm/tw/f £11/27/65; 💻 ♿) has the same stupendous views. The hostel is casual with a huge dining area and well-maintained rooms; the family room is good value if you want to bring the clan.

At the northern end of the peninsula at **Kilmuir** (Cille Mhoire), the **Skye Museum of Island Life** (☎ 552206; adult/child £2/75p; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) re-creates crofting life in a series of thatched cottages. Up the hill from the museum in the Kilmuir cemetery is **Flora MacDonald's grave**. Flora became famous for helping Bonnie Prince Charlie escape following his defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. She dressed him up in drag to play her maid as they escaped over the sea to Skye. She was imprisoned in the Tower of London for a year for her pains.

Just 3 miles south of Staffin, **Glenview Hotel** (☎ 562248; www.glenskye.co.uk; d & tw £65-75), on the west side of the road, is a whitewashed hotel with comfort and hospitality belied by an unexceptional exterior. Friendly owners serve up massive breakfasts (ask for an extra serve of the delicious fruit pudding) and rooms have four-post beds for romantic weekenders.

Uig (Uige)

From whichever direction you come into Uig *(oo-ig)*, the picture-perfect harbour, enclosed by steep hills, always impresses, particularly if the ferry is chugging across the bay. The new **tourist office** (☎ 542404; www.uig-isleofskye.com; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) has lots of information and enthusiasm about this area.

Before you jump on your ferry, you can book ahead to tour (and taste) the **Isle of Skye Brewery** (☎ 542477; www.skyebrewery.co.uk; tours £2; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), which brews the local ales.

Very handy to the ferry, the lovely **Orasay B&B** (☎ 542316; www.orasay.freeserve.co.uk/bandb.html; 14 Indrigil St; s/d £22.50/45) has rooms that are ideal if you're heading off first thing in the morning for the Outer Hebrides. Owners are used to fly-by-nighters and happily do early breakfasts.

With a kitchen that overlooks the bay, you'll be racing to do the washing up at the chilled-out **Uig SYHA** (☎ 0870 004 1155; dm £13.50). Eight-bunk dorms are large enough to allow everyone their own space, while the lounge is a good spot in which to hole up when the rain sets in. The family room is a good bet for groups and there's a separate bunkhouse for overflow.

The **Pub at the Pier** (☎ 542212; The Pier; mains £8-10) does straight-up meals, but the 180-degree panorama of the harbour is ideal for watching the ferry come and go.

From Uig pier, CalMac has ferry services to Lochmaddy on North Uist (single per person/car £9.15/44, 1¾ hours, one or two daily) and to Tarbert on Harris (single per person/car £9.15/44, 1½ hours, one or two daily Monday to Saturday).

ISLE OF RAASAY

☎ 01478 / pop 194

You might want to keep it to yourself, but Raasay (Rathatsair) has some of the most spectacular views across to the Cuillins and some good beginners' walks. The most popular stroll is up the conical hill of **Dun Caan** (443m). Forest Enterprise publishes a free leaflet (available from tourist offices) with other suggested walks. This small rugged island to the northeast of Skye is so happily off the tourist trail that there's no petrol station.

The most atmospheric and adventurous place to stay on the island is **Raasay Outdoor Centre** (☎ 660266; s/d from £18.50/37; 🕘 10am-9pm Mon-Sat), a ramshackle former clan mansion that now offers courses in sailing, climbing and kayaking (one-day activities from £50). Rooms range from intimate singles to large group bunkhouses and staff offer pick-ups from the ferry. Guest have the option of full board or there's the attached **Dolphin Café** (meals £5 to £8) which does delicious light meals.

Also recommended is the **Raasay SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1146; www.syha.org.uk; dm £9.50; 🕘 mid-May–Aug), north of Inverarish, a refurbished but basic hostel; and the **Isle of Raasay Hotel** (☎ 660222; www.isleofraasayhotel.co.uk; d £35; 🕘 lunch & dinner), which has good rooms and reliable meals (£6 to £8).

CalMac operates ferries from Sconser on Skye (between Portree and Broadford) to Inverarish on Raasay (return per person/car £2.60/10.25, 15 minutes, nine to 11 Monday to Saturday).

OUTER HEBRIDES

Scotland's wild Western Isles (as they're also called) are something of a frontier, an outpost shielding the mainland from Atlantic gales. Their Viking name *havbredey* ('islands at the edge of the earth') still feels true today.

The islands have long subsisted on fishing, weaving and crofting, and have developed a strong sense of their own independence. The distinctive horned Hebridean sheep have right of way on the roads around here, and you might have to adopt to local custom such as the preserving of the Sabbath (see p914). Scottish Gaelic is a working language here: signposts put the Gaelic first, and almost half of Gaelic-speaking Scots live on these islands.

Outside the semibustle of Stornoway, life exists mostly in small villages compiled of crumbling ruinous stone cottages interspersed with fresh, squat concrete bungalows; until relatively recently the main unit of housing was the blackhouse, a primitive cottage with dry stone walls and a thatched roof built around a peat hearth.

Orientation & Information

The Outer Hebrides consists of more than 200 islands running in a 130-mile arc from north to south, shielding the northwest coast of Scotland. Lewis and Harris are actually one island with a border of high hills between them. Stornoway, on Lewis, is the largest town in the Outer Hebrides, with a reasonable range of facilities. North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist are joined by bridges and causeways.

There are tourist offices in every ferry port. Those in Stornoway and Tarbert open year-round (the others open early April to mid-October) and remain open late for ferry arrivals.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are airports at Stornoway (Lewis), and on Benbecula and Barra. There are flights to Stornoway from Edinburgh (daily), Inverness (daily) and Glasgow (Monday to Saturday). There are also two flights a day (weekdays only) between Stornoway and Benbecula. Standard one-way fares are around £150, but can be as low as £30.

There are daily flights from Glasgow to Barra and Benbecula. At Barra, the planes land on the hard-sand beach at low tide, so the timetable is tidal.

Airlines serving the Western Isles:

bmi (☎ 0870 607 0555; www.flybmi.com)

British Airways/Loganair (☎ 0845 779 9977; www.britishairways.com)

Highland Airways (☎ 01851-701282; www.highlandairways.co.uk)

BOAT

CalMac (☎ 0870 565 0000; www.calmac.co.uk) runs car ferries from Ullapool to Stornoway (Lewis); from Uig (Isle of Skye) to Lochmaddy (North Uist) and Tarbert (Harris); and from Oban to Castlebay (Barra), continuing to Lochboisdale (South Uist).

Crossing	Duration	Car	Driver/ Passenger
Oban-Castlebay	4¾hr	£76	£21
Oban-Lochboisdale	6¾hr	£76	£21
Uig-Lochmaddy	1¾hr	£45	£9.40
Uig-Tarbert	1½hr	£45	£9.40
Ullapool-Stornoway	2¾hr	£70	£15

From Monday to Saturday there are two or three CalMac ferries daily to Stornoway, two to Tarbert and Lochmaddy, and one to Castlebay and Lochboisdale; on Sunday there are ferries (same frequency) to Castlebay, Lochboisdale and Lochmaddy only. Advance booking for cars are essential in July and August.

CalMac has 12 different Island Hopscotch tickets for set routes in the Outer Hebrides, offering a saving of around 10% (tickets are valid for one month).

Getting Around

The *Skye and Western Isles Travel Guide,* from tourist offices for £1, lists all current air, bus and ferry services. Visitors without their own transport should anticipate a fair amount of hitching and walking. Flights by **British Airways** (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.ba.com) partners link the islands of Barra, Benbecula and Lewis. At Barra the planes land on the beach at Cockle Strand, so timetables depend on tides. Ferries run between Leverburgh on Harris and Berneray on North Uist and between Lochboisdale on South Uist and Castlebay on Barra.

There are limited bus services, especially on Sunday.

BICYCLE

Cycling north to south is popular, but allow at least a week for the trip. The main problems are difficult weather, strong winds (you hear stories of people cycling downhill and freewheeling uphill) and sheep that believe they have the right of way.

Bikes are available for hire:

Alex Dan's Cycle Centre (☎ 01851-704025; 67 Kenneth St, Stornoway, Lewis)

Barra Cycle Hire (☎ 01871-810284; 29 St Brendan's Rd, Castlebay, Barra)

Rothan Cycles (☎ 01870-620283; 9 Howmore, South Uist)

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Most roads are single-track; sheep wandering onto them pose the main hazard. Petrol stations are far apart, expensive and usually closed on Sunday. We've given town names in both English and Gaelic, as signs are often only in Gaelic.

Cars can be hired from around £20 per day:

Gaeltech Car Hire (☎ 01859-520460; Grimisdale Guest House, Leverburgh, Harris)

Laing Motors (☎ 01878-700267; Lochboisdale, South Uist)

Mackinnon Self Drive (☎ 01851-702984; 18 Inaclete Rd, Stornoway, Lewis)

LEWIS (LEODHAIS)

☎ 01851 / pop 18,489

Striped with black peat diggings across verdant green fields and towering mountains cut away by coastline to become impressive cliffs, Lewis is an island of extreme beauty. The northern part of the northernmost Hebridean islands, you'll hear Gaelic in pubs and mumbled when locals want to curse tourists here, but once you break through the remoteness Lewis is a welcoming island. The north is dominated by the vast Black Moor where peat cutting is a serious business providing islanders with fuel; it is cut from the earth and heaped in geometric piles in summer.

Stornoway (Steornabhagh)

pop 8569

Stornoway is the bustling 'capital' of the Outer Hebrides and the archipelago's only real town. The beautiful, natural harbour was first appreciated by the Vikings who established bases here so they could more comfortably raid further south.

More of a workhorse than a show pony, outside of the pretty centre the town can feel industrial. It hosts the base for the Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean), a hospital and the islands' Gaelic TV and radio stations. It may not blow your socks off, but it does make a pleasant introduction to this remote corner of the country. Some great food is made right here, including Britain's best black pudding and the ever-tempting Hebridean ales.

NEVER ON A SUNDAY

The Sabbath is strictly observed throughout the Hebrides. Some of the strictest locals don't believe in cooking (re-heated leftovers only) or driving (a sermon allegedly asked locals in Gaelic 'Did Jesus have a car?') on Sunday, preferring to devote the day to bible readings, worship and contemplation. When British Airways introduced Sunday flights in 2002, churches were outraged proposing boycotts, but the planes eventually took off. Similarly a petrol station in Stornoway famously flouts the Sabbath, daring to sell newspapers that other retailers will only give you on Monday; it's assured its place in hell by trading in the devil's drink.

For visitors it can be frustrating, but not impossible. You'll need to plan your travel around Sunday: most shops will close, though most hotels continue to trade. Unless you're in Stornoway, you'll need to fill up your petrol tank. While you may sometimes find it difficult, it's best to go with the flow and embrace the relaxed spirit of the day. By observing the Sabbath in your own way, you'll also be showing respect for the culture you're visiting.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Stornoway is on the east coast and compact enough to make exploring on foot easy. The ferry docks at the CalMac terminal on the foreshore; the bus station is next door.

Library (☎ 708631; 19 Cromwell St; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sat, to 6pm Thu & Fri) Free internet access, and café.

Tourist office (☎ 703088; www.witb.co.uk; 26 Cromwell St; ⏰ 9am-6pm & 8.30-9.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-8pm Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm & 8.30-9.30pm Sat)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The small **Museum nan Eilean** (☎ 709266; Francis St; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Oct-Mar) explains the loose history of the Outer Hebrides, and explores traditional island life and the impact of progress and technology.

After the culture fix, you've earned a chug at the **Hebridean Brewery** (☎ 700123; 18a Bells Rd, cnr Rigs Rd; ⏰ by appointment) which brews up morish local beers, with tours by appointment.

Instead of complaining about the weather you can always ride it with **West Isles Kite Company** (☎ 672771; www.wikc.co.uk; 1hr from £25), which does pick ups from town and can have you out chasing the big breeze in a power-kite or kite buggy.

SLEEPING

Laxdale Holiday Park (☎ 703234; www.laxdaleholidaypark.com; 6 Laxdale Lane; tent sites £7, motor vans £9, dm £12, cottages £50-55; ⏰ camp site Apr-Oct, bunkhouse year-round) North of town, 1.5 miles off the A857, this tidy site has something for everyone with good grassy camping areas, a roomy (only four bunks per room) modern bunkhouse and nice new self-catering cottages. It can be difficult to get to without your own transport.

Stornoway Backpackers (☎ 703628; www.stornoway-hostel.co.uk; 47 Keith St; dm £10) With six-bunk dorms (and maybe a pull-out bed during peak season) rooms can feel a little tight, vut the kitchens are spick-and-span with bathrooms that put some of the town's hotels to shame. While it may feel a little old, the bright new wardens will soon spark it up.

Hebridean Guest House (☎ 702268; 61 Bayhead St; s/d £35/60) If you're looking for solo accommodation, this place has six singles as well as several doubles and twins. There's a diverting little video collection for wet weather and rooms are conservatively decorated. Breakfast includes healthy fruit and yogurt which is a relief from the pudding-pushing places elsewhere.

Park Guest House (☎ 702485; 30 James St; s £54, d £84-96) Undergoing substantial renovations when we visited, this Victorian house was creating larger all en-suite rooms to suit true foodies. As well as dining in the high-class seafood restaurant, you can do a cookery course that specialises in local produce and traditional dishes. Ask about discounts for stays of more than three nights.

Royal Hotel (☎ 702109; www.calahotels.com; Cromwell St; s/d £58/89) The Royal has sassed itself up downstairs as HS-1 café-bar (see opposite) and some of this sophistication has crept upstairs. Rear-facing rooms are modern and avoid downstairs bar noise, while front rooms are more traditional. It's one of the better options in town.

Other recommendations:

Kildun (☎ 703247; kildun@bushinternet.com; 14 Goathill Rd; s/d from £18/36) A peaceful B&B a 10-minute walk uphill from the centre.

Fernlea (☎ 702125; 9 Matheson Rd; s/d £30/50) A Victorian home in mint-green, with a cost-saving optional breakfast.

EATING & DRINKING

Corner (☎ 701869; cnr Francis & Keith Sts; tapas £2-6, mains £4-7; ⏰ lunch & dinner) Say *'hola'* to the town's new Spanish-inspired eatery that's refitted this former hostel in swish style. You can graze with a wine over *calamares Andaluza* (tender calamari) tapas or *gambas al ajillo* (garlicky prawns) or make it a longer stay with fish- and chicken-based mains. There are good veggie options, particularly in the morish tapas.

HS-1 (☎ 702109; Cromwell St; mains £5-8; ⏰ noon-9pm Mon-Sat, 5-9pm Sun) This is where Stornoway's younger crowd chow down on pastas, wraps and curries, in a stylish ambience with modern pop as a soundtrack. It's a fun spot, but booking ahead on Sunday is advised.

Digby Chick (☎ 700026; 28 Point St; mains £14-17; ⏰ noon-10pm Mon-Sat) Head and shoulders above the rest of the dining scene, this chick should be made a Lady for services to Stornoway dining. Dapper staff dash about bringing you delicious dishes, with seafood playing a major part. Evening visits are recommended it gets romantic with candlelight and impressive specials.

Other recommendations:

Library Café (19 Cromwell St; snacks £2-5; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sat, to 6pm Thu & Fri) An ideal spot for a pot of tea with home-baked slice, scones or toasties.

Thai Café (☎ 701811; 27 Church St; mains £5-7; ⏰ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) An unremarkable exterior disguises authentic Thai food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run from Stornoway to Tarbert (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday) and Leverburgh (£3.90, two hours, five daily Monday to Saturday).

MacLennan Coaches (☎ 702114) run a circular route from Stornoway to Callanish, Carloway, and Arnol; the timetable means you've got time to visit one or two of these places in a day. An all-day ticket costs £5.

Arnol Blackhouse Museum

About 2 miles west of Barvas off the A858, this **museum** (HS; ☎ 710395; adult/child £4/1.60; ⏰ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, last admission 30min before closing; ♿) is an original blackhouse, combined byre, barn and home and an example of the traditional home in the Hebrides. Built in 1885, the house uses materials that were handy, such as turf for the roof and driftwood (including a beam that was once a tiller). The central fire was essential for keeping the turf roof dry, but not too dry, as well as keeping human and animal inhabitants warm. Across the road is a whitehouse, which was the next architectural evolution, where the owner of this blackhouse moved, when she sold to the government in 1964.

Carloway (Carlabagh) & Garenin (Gearrannan)

Carloway looks across a beautiful loch to the southern mountains and contains the defiantly perched **Dun Carloway Broch**, a well-preserved, 2000-year-old dry stone defensive tower. If you get the place to yourself, you're likely to get an eerie feeling as you crawl through the little entrance ways. Nearby is the **Doune Broch Centre** (☎ 643338; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat late May-early Sep) with a fascinating interpretative display.

At nearby Garenin, the **Gearrannan Blackhouse Village** sits on the verge of a dramatic Atlantic shelf above a stony beach. The village consists of nine restored thatched-roof blackhouses. Entering the **Blackhouse museum** (☎ 643416; adult/child £2.50/1; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) is the only way to see inside these houses; exhibits feature working looms and authentic-smelling byres. There's also a café serving simple snacks.

Another of the blackhouses holds **Garenin Crofters' Hostel** (www.gatliff.org.uk; dm £8, cottage d per week from £78), which is warm (the fire has been replaced with central heating) and wonderfully atmospheric. Some of the other blackhouses can be rented as self-catering cottages. It's far bigger inside than you'd imagine, and is especially snug when the wind is whistling outside.

Callanish (Calanais)

Callanish is 12 miles west of Stornoway and home to the **Callanish Standing Stones** (HS; ⏰ daily), which form one of Britain's most complete stone circles. Set on a wild and secluded promontory overlooking Loch Roag, these 13 monuments of banded gneiss are arranged as in worship around a central 4.5m-high monolith. Another 40 smaller stones radiate from the circle in the shape of a cross, with the remains of a chambered tomb at the centre. Dating from between 3800 and 5000 years ago, the stones are roughly contemporaneous with Egypt's pyramids. While visually impressive and imbued with all sorts of New Age speculations, their real purpose continues to baffle.

Calanais Visitor Centre (☎ 621422; admission free, exhibition adult/child £2/1, snacks £1-4; ⏰ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, to 4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is discreetly designed not to interfere with the visual impact of the stones. A small exhibition speculates on the meaning and construction of the monoliths, using photos, audiovisual shows and other displays.

Mealista (Mealasta) & Around

The road to Mealista (the B8011 southwest of Callanish, signposted to Uig) takes you through the most remote parts of Lewis. Follow the road around towards **Breanais** for some truly spectacular white-sand beaches, although the surf can make swimming treacherous. The famous 12th-century walrus-ivory Lewis chess pieces were discovered in the sand dunes here in 1831, most of which ended up in London's British Museum.

Butt of Lewis (Rubha Robhanais) & Around

Heading north on A857, you head into the Gaelic heartland of the Hebrides with nine out of 10 people you meet speaking the language. You can hear Gaelic spoken over the crackling fires in the back bar of the **Cross Inn** (☎ 810687; www.crossinn.com; Port of Ness; s/d £33/48), a delightful spot that does toothsome meals (£6 to £10) and a good ale. If you've got a thirst for the language, a little further along the road is **An Sgoil Shumhraidm** (Gaelic Summer School; ☎ 770491; jayne.macleod@lews.uhi.ac.uk; 4-day course £150; 🕒 Jul & Aug), which offers summer classes in the language and also attracts international visitors for its traditional music classes.

The main settlement at this end of the island is the attractive harbour of **Port of Ness** (Port Nis), which hosts **10 Callicvol** (☎ 810193; www.10callicvol.com; Port of Ness; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat Apr-Sep), a large private collection of books on the Hebrides and Scotland, many in Gaelic; upstairs there's an excellent quilt display. To the west is the sandy beach of **Traigh**, which is popular with surfers. At Eoropie (Eoropaidh), further along the road, is **St Moluag's Church** (Teampull Mholuidh), a sweet structure that dates from the 12th century. The road ends at the **Butt of Lewis** (insert your own arse gag here), the extreme northern tip of the Hebrides which is marked by an imposing **lighthouse**.

HARRIS (NA HEARADH)

☎ 01859 / pop 1984

Keep it quiet but out of the conjoined twins of Harris and Lewis, this southern sibling got all the looks. With golden-sand beaches, rugged rocky coastline and scenic expanses of *machair* (grass- and wildflower-covered sand dunes), the steep wall-like mountains of North Harris could almost be designed to keep its northern neighbours out. The highest of these mountains is the Clisham (An Cliseam) which crowns the ridge at 799m.

South Harris doesn't have the mountainous division but the land bridge at Tarbert similarly shields its white-sand beaches from northerners. It could be that they don't want folk from Lewis to be shamed by all this beauty.

Harris is, of course, famous for Harris Tweed, a homemade fabric (see the boxed text, opposite) which although also made in Lewis is named for the southern isle. You can see why there'd be rivalry between these two islands.

Tarbert (Tairbeart)

pop 1338

This tough little village gripping the surrounding hillside serves as the link between the two islands. Tarbert has ferry connections to Uig on Skye as it's hemmed in by two sea-based lochs. But when the sun's shining this scenic port can be a real slice of heaven.

The **tourist office** (☎ 502011; Pier Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm & 8-9pm Tue, Thu & Sat) is signposted up the hill. Tarbert is a service centre with a petrol station, an ATM at the tourist office and two general stores. There are several small craft stores around town, but **Harris Tweed Shop** (☎ 502493; Main St) stocks books, CDs and tweed clothing that all make good last-minute gifts as you wait for the ferry.

Rockview Bunkhouse (☎ 502081; Main St; dm £10) is an older place that can feel a bit cramped, but its functional communal facilities and views of…well, rocks, makes it a good option, particularly if you're catching an early ferry.

If you've been roughing it elsewhere, the large, country **Harris Hotel** (☎ 502154; www.harrishotel.com; s £40-55, d £70-100) will feel like a step back into civilisation. Easily the town's best rooms are furnished in colourful modern style, and the meals in the restaurant (three-course dinner £24), open for lunch and dinner, are brilliant. While you're there check out the signature of author JM Barrie scratched into one of the windows. For another brush with fame, this is where the 'stars' of BBC's *Survivor* were airlifted to after their island became too dangerous.

First Fruits (☎ 502439; Pier Rd; 🕒 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Jun, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Apr, May & Sep) is a sweet snack house which does warming hot chocolate when the wind is lashing the town – and great snack lunches and cakes when it's not.

THE TANGLED WEB WE TWEED

If you think tweed is a fusty fabric worn by professors and country gentlemen, you obviously haven't been watching footwear fashion. When sneaker supremo Nike wanted to refresh its Terminator design it thought Harris Tweed would make the perfect fabric. Only problem was, the American shoe manufacturer wanted 10,000m of the hand-loomed fabric.

The homemade manufacture of Harris Tweed (on rickety machines that are pedalled much like bicycles) is protected by an act of parliament that strictly forbids using means of mass-production. When Nike approached solo tweeder Donald John Mackay to create its massive order, Mackay knew he'd have to enlist the help of *all* of the island's tweed makers. Working round the clock for several months, tweeders on Harris and Lewis eventually produced the required bolts of fabric.

And the results? The Terminator II sold well, enjoying popularity with hip-hoppers and soccer mums from Los Angeles to London. Fortunately for Mackay and the island's other exhausted tweeders, there are no plans for a follow-up shoe.

You can visit Donald John Mackay as he works in his studio at **Luskentyre Harris Tweed Co** (☎ 01859-550261; 6 Luskentyre; admission free; 🕒 9am-6pm), or check out **Lewis Loom Centre** (☎ 01859-704500; 3 Bayhead; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), although the latter no longer does displays. If you're wanting to pick up some tweed souvenirs, it seems like just about everywhere sells them, but some of the best prices are at Lewis Loom Centre.

Harris Coaches operates buses running to/from Leverburgh (50 minutes, four to five daily Monday to Saturday) and Stornoway (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday).

For ferries to Uig on Skye, see p913.

South Harris

If you don't think Britain has real beaches, wait until you see South Harris. The A859 wraps around the west coast and is backed by rolling *machair* and mountains, with views across to North Harris and to offshore islands. Azure waters give way to shallow turquoise, and lap lazily against achingly tempting sandy shores. The best beach here is **Luskentyre**; if the sun is shining it looks like paradise!

Want to explore somewhere unique? The east, or Bays, coast is a strange, rocky moonscape, studded with small ponds and still dotted with numerous crofts. It's hard to believe that this area is still inhabited, but if you're wanting to get off the beaten track you could have a small beach to yourself here.

On your way south on the A859, you'll strike the **Seallam! Centre** (☎ 520258; adult/child £2.50/free; 💻), a small museum with displays on tweed, local fishing and regularly changing exhibitions. It's also one of the only places on Harris with internet access (per 20 minutes £1).

There were grand plans for **Leverburgh** (An t-Ob) to become a major fishing port in the early 20th century, but the fishing boom never came. Today it's the kind of town where black-faced Cheviot sheep, rather than late-night hoons, wander the street.

The quirky **Am Bothan** (☎ 520251; www.ambothan.com; Leverburgh; dm £14; ♿) is owned by a boat builder and you can see evidence of his trade hanging around the hostel, literally. Suspended from the colourful common room–cum-kitchen is a large lifeboat; the sense of fun follows through to the beachcombing-decorated rooms which are large enough to allow for guests' storage needs. It's a top spot to…as the sign out the front says…'Be warm, be dry.'

With an impressive carved eagle out the front, it's hard to miss **Grimmisadale B&B** (☎ 520 460; www.grimisdale.co.uk; Leverburgh; s/d £50/70), which has an enviable view of the loch. There's a good selection of DVDs for the days when you can't see the views. Couples often opt for the Harris Room, complete with Jacuzzi, while families appreciate the suite which is like a small apartment (but at the same affordable rates).

Down by the pier **Anchorage Restaurant** (☎ 520 225; The Pier, Leverburgh; meals £7-11; 🕒 11am-8pm) caters to the ferry crowd with some welcome Italian options and standard seafood. It's a bit pricey, but you're paying for proximity.

A ferry goes from Leverburgh to the Isle of Berneray (per person/car £5.20/23.70, 1¼ hours, three to four Monday to Saturday), which is connected by a causeway to North Uist.

Three miles east at **Rodel** (Roghadal) stands the remarkable **St Clement's Church** (HS; admission free). Built between the 1520s and 1550s, it remains an endearing cruciform-designed house of worship with an impressive tower in the west.

NORTH UIST (UIBHIST A TUATH)

☎ 01876 / pop 1657

Uist is such a scramble of land, lochs and sea that you'll never know which one you're on. The roads linking the land are canyoned-in single lanes that you're likely to be sharing with sheep as well as oncoming traffic. Atmospheric ruins dot its moors and stunning beaches along its western side complement wondrous views north to the mountains of Harris.

The unique mix of water and land means that it's a great place to spot huge populations of migrant waders: oystercatchers, lapwings, curlews and redshanks. To work out the difference, you can grab a free copy of *Birds of the Uists* at most tourist offices.

You can gallop between the jewelled lochs with **North Uist Riding Centre** (☎ 07786 817577; northuistrc@aol.com).

Car ferries for Leverburgh, on South Harris, leave from Berneray, which is connected to North Uist by a causeway.

Lochmaddy (Loch nam Madadh)

There's not much to keep you in tiny Lochmaddy, but it's the first town you hit after arriving on the Berneray ferry. The name, meaning Loch of Dogs refers to caninelike rock formations that you might spot on the ferry trip in.

A Bank of Scotland ATM enables you to cash up for the couple of stores, petrol station, post office and pub. The **tourist office** (☎ 500321; ⏲ 9am-1pm, 2-5pm & 7.30-8.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue & Thu, 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Sat) also opens for late ferry arrivals. Out of town you can go on otter and bird walks around Loch Langass, leaving from Langass Lodge; call **RSPB Warden** (☎ 560287) to book.

Taigh Chearsabhagh (☎ 500293; www.taigh-chearsabhagh.org; admission by donation, internet by donation, snacks £2-5; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Feb-Dec; 💻) is a converted 18th-century inn and Lochmaddy's main culture fix, with a wildlife centre, contemporary art gallery and kids play area. The café serves good soup and sandwiches.

our pick **Tigh Dearg Hotel** (☎ 500700; www.tighdearghotel.co.uk; d B&B £130), a welcome new addition to Lochmaddy's hotel scene, is suavely furnished, from the leather lounges around the fire in the bar to the mauve-brown bedspreads in rooms. With only eight rooms it's all about understated luxury. Extras such as individual DVD players, flat-screen TVs and a gym with sauna all create one of the coolest sleeps in the Hebrides.

A simple bunkhouse for active types is the **Uist Outdoor Centre** (☎ 500480; www.uistoutdoorcentre.co.uk; dm £11, half-/full-day activities from £25/50; ♿ 💻 wi-fi). It has four-bed dorms and well-used lounge area that's perfect for comparing abseiling yarns. It'll help you make some of those stories with half- and full-day adventures, including abseiling, sea kayaking and scuba diving.

Langass Lodge (☎ 580285; www.langasslodge.co.uk; Locheport; s/d from £62/95), a former hunting lodge, still has a few old trophies on the walls, but is otherwise completely refurbished for comfort. The lochside location makes it worth the 10-minute drive south from Lochmaddy, even if you're just here for dinner at the award-winning restaurant renowned for seafood and estate game, including grouse, snipe and woodcock.

Balranald RSPB Reserve

At this reserve, 18 miles west of Lochmaddy off the A865, you can watch migrant waders or rare red-necked phalarope, and listen for corncrakes. There's a **visitors centre** (☎ 510372; ⏲ Apr-Sep) with a resident warden.

BENBECULA (BEINN NA FAOGHLA)

☎ 01870 / pop 1249

A stepping stone between North Uist and South Uist and connected by causeways, Benbecula is a low-lying island that's almost as much water as land. The army's Hebrides Rocket Range takes up most of the west coast (be careful where you wander) and **Balivanich** (Baile a'Mhanaich), a commercial centre servicing the troops, is probably the only reason for a visit. Here you'll find services such as a bunkhouse, ATM, post office and supermarket.

SOUTH UIST (UIBHIST A DEAS)

☎ 01878 / pop 1951

South Uist is the second-largest island in the Outer Hebrides and offers many opportunities to explore off the north–south road (A865). It lacks the concentrated scenic wonder of Harris, but its expansiveness has its own magic. *Machair*-backed beaches create an almost uninterrupted golden blade along the west coast of South Uist while the east coast is nicked by four large sea lochs. Also on the east coast, the island's highest peak **Beinn Mhor** (620m) reaches out of a rugged ridge.

Lochboisdale (Loch Baghasdail)

The ferry port of Lochboisdale in the southeast is the island's largest settlement, although you'll likely be muttering 'grim' and 'bleak' rather than running to the postcard shop. The **tourist office** (☎ 700286; ⏲ Easter–mid-Oct) also opens for late ferry arrivals. There is a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland with an ATM here, and petrol pumps.

The reliable **Lochboisdale Hotel** (☎ 700332; www.lochboisdale.com; s/d £50/75; Ⓟ), above the ferry terminal, has old-fashioned rooms with sea views. The bar serves fish-based meals (£8 to £12) with the odd pasta.

Right from the word go the fabulously effusive host at **Brae Lea B&B** (☎ 700497; Lasgair; s/d £35/50) makes you feel like one of the family in this snug spot. A hefty breakfast is a good start to the day, and the baths in most rooms make a great way to end it. The large book nook opposite the entry door is another real treat.

There are CalMac ferries between Lochboisdale and Castlebay on Barra (per person/car £5.80/18.40, 1½ hours). Ferries sail roughly every second day, with additional summer services.

Howmore (Tobha Mor)

This attractive coastal village in the northwest, with its thatched cottages and ruined medieval chapels, was the burial site of the Ranald clan chiefs.

About 6 miles south of Howmore, the excellent **Kildonan museum** (☎ 710343; adult/child £1.50/free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct) details crofting life using artefacts and black-and-white photographs. There are also many local accounts of harsh Hebridean life.

Tobha Mor Crofters' Hostel (www.gatliff.org.uk; dm £8) is a basic stone cottage in the village. To get there, take the turn-off from the A865 to **Tobha Mor** – the cottage is by the church at the road's end.

The South

The southern tip of the island looks across to the islands of Eriskay and Barra. A causeway links Ludag on South Uist to Eriskay, and there's a CalMac ferry between Eriskay and Ardmhor on Barra (per person/car £5.50/16.25, 40 minutes, four to five daily).

BARRA (BARRAIGH)

☎ 01871 / pop 1172

This tiny island, just 12 miles in circumference, is the pendant dangling from the chain of the Outer Hebrides. With beautiful beaches, *machair*, hills, Neolithic remains and a strong sense of community, it's almost a caricature of the Outer Hebrides. The MacNeil clan has traditionally held power here, apart from a brief stint from 1838 when they sold the island to the brutal Colonel Gordon of Cluny who orchestrated some of the harshest Clearances. In 1937, the MacNeils returned, buying the island back and restoring order.

Castlebay (Bagh a Chaisteil), in the south, is the largest village. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 810336; Main St; ⏲ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun). The village gets its name from **Kisimul Castle** (HS; ☎ 810313; adult/child incl ferry £3.70/2.50; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct), which was built by the MacNeils in the 12th century, and gifted to Historic Scotland in 2000 for an annual rental of £1 plus a bottle of whisky.

Dunard Hostel (☎ 810443; www.dunardhostel.co.uk; Castlebay; dm/d £11/30), a family-run hostel, has 16 comfy beds, and is just a five-minute walk from the ferry. It can also organise sea-kayaking tours (half-/full day £20/30).

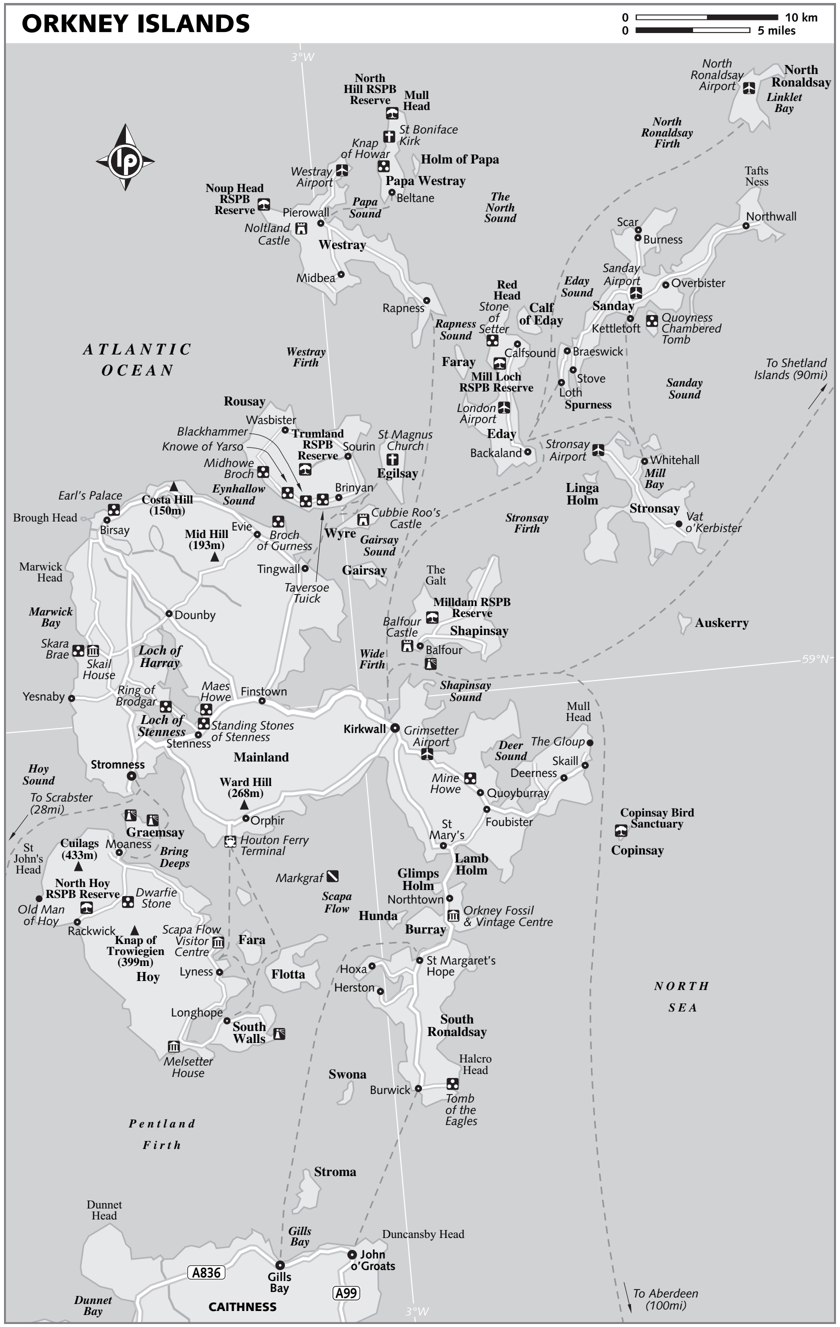
The modern B&B **Faire Mhaoldonaich** (☎ 810 441; www.fairemhaoldonaich.com; Nasg; r per person £23-25; ⏲ Mar-Oct) has spacious, comfortable rooms with great views over Bagh Beag to the isle of Mhaoldonaich; it's a mile west of Castlebay on the road to Vatersay.

CalMac ferries operate from Castlebay to Lochboisdale – see left for details. For details on the ferry between Oban and Castlebay, see p913.

ORKNEY ISLANDS

You'll know you're in the Orkneys when the accents sound slightly more musical; some have compared it favourably to Welsh. In fact local people have a Viking heritage which you can see set in stone at ancient sites throughout the island.

Lying only a few miles off the mainland, the Orkneys consists of 70 islands, of which only 16 are inhabited. These fertile green lands, stripped of trees by the howling winds, form a sort of oasis in the wild Atlantic. The climate, warmed by the Gulf Stream, is surprisingly moderate, with April and May being the driest months.


ORKNEY ISLANDS
0 10 km
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3°W
North Hill RSPB Reserve
Mull Head
St Boniface Kirk
Knap of Howar
Holm of Papa
Westray Airport
Papa Westray
Beltane
Noup Head RSPB Reserve
Pierowall
Papa Sound
The North Sound
Noltland Castle
Westray
Midbea
Rapness
North Ronaldsay Airport
North Ronaldsay
Linklet Bay
North Ronaldsay Firth
Tafts Ness
Northwall
Scar
Burness
Sanday Airport
Overbister
Eday Sound
Sanday
Quoyness Chambered Tomb
Kettletoft
Red Head
Stone of Setter
Calf of Eday
Rapness Sound
Faray
Calfsound
Braeswick
Mill Loch RSPB Reserve
Stove
Loth
Spurness
London Airport
Eday
Backaland
Sanday Sound
To Shetland Islands (90mi)
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Westray Firth
Rousay
Wasbister
Blackhammer
Knowe of Yarso
Midhowe Broch
Trumland RSPB Reserve
Sourin
St Magnus Church
Egilsay
Eynhallow Sound
Brinyan
Stronsay Airport
Whitehall
Mill Bay
Stronsay
Vat o'Kerbister
Linga Holm
Stronsay Firth
Earl's Palace
Costa Hill (150m)
Brough Head
Birsay
Mid Hill (193m)
Evie
Broch of Gurness
Cubbie Roo's Castle
Wyre
Gairsay Sound
Gairsay
Tingwall
Taversoe Tuick
The Galt
Marwick Head
Marwick Bay
Dounby
Milldam RSPB Reserve
Balfour Castle
Shapinsay
Balfour
Auskerry
Skara Brae
Skail House
Loch of Harray
Wide Firth
Shapinsay Sound
59°N
Yesnaby
Ring of Brodgar
Maes Howe
Finstown
Loch of Stenness
Standing Stones of Stenness
Stenness
Kirkwall
Grimsetter Airport
Mull Head
Deer Sound
The Gloup
Skaill
Deerness
Mainland
Hoy Sound
Stromness
Ward Hill (268m)
Mine Howe
Quoyburray
To Scrabster (28mi)
Orphir
Foubister
Copinsay Bird Sanctuary
Copinsay
Graemsay
St John's Head
Cuilags (433m)
Moaness
Bring Deeps
Houton Ferry Terminal
St Mary's
Lamb Holm
North Hoy RSPB Reserve
Dwarfie Stone
Markgraf
Glimps Holm
Old Man of Hoy
Scapa Flow
Northtown
Orkney Fossil & Vintage Centre
Rackwick
Knap of Trowiegien (399m)
Scapa Flow Visitor Centre
Fara
Hunda
Burray
Hoy
Lyness
Flotta
Hoxa
St Margaret's Hope
Herston
NORTH SEA
Longhope
South Walls
South Ronaldsay
Melsetter House
Swona
Halcro Head
Burwick
Tomb of the Eagles
Pentland Firth
Stroma
Dunnet Head
Gills Bay
Duncansby Head
John o'Groats
A836
A99
Dunnet Bay
CAITHNESS
To Aberdeen (100mi)

Getting There& Away

AIR

There are flights to Kirkwall airport on **BA/Loganair** (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com) daily from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and the Shetlands, with connections to London. If your dates are flexible, buy the tickets online, as you can easily see which days still have cheaper fares available. The cheapest return tickets cost around £165 from London and £108 from Inverness.

BOAT & BUS

Drivers should book these crossings well in advance in summer, although, even if it's fully booked, there's always a chance of turning up a couple of hours before and squeezing on if there's extra space. All prices listed are for one-way trips.

Pentland Ferries (☎ 01856-831226; www.pentlandferries.co.uk) operates a ferry between Gills Bay, 3 miles west of John o'Groats, and St Margaret's Hope on Orkney (per person/car £10/25, one hour, three to four daily April to October), with reduced sailings in winter.

NorthLink Ferries (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) operates ferries from Scrabster, by Thurso, to Stromness (per person/car £14/43, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday and Sunday) and from Kirkwall to Lerwick (per person/car £17.75/73.75, eight hours, three to four weekly) on the Shetland Islands. Fares vary according to whether it is low, mid- or peak season and travel durations vary due to winds. NorthLink Ferries also sails from Aberdeen to Kirkwall and Lerwick.

John o'Groats Ferries (☎ 01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk) has a ferry (passengers and bicycles only) from John o'Groats to Burwick on South Ronaldsay from May to September (single/return £16/26, 40 minutes, up to four daily). There is an off-peak deal to Kirkwall for £24 return. In Thurso, a free bus meets the train from Inverness at about 2.50pm, and a bus for Kirkwall meets the ferry in Burwick (17 miles away). It also operates the Orkney Bus, a bus-ferry-bus through service between Inverness and Kirkwall via John o'Groats (single £28, approximately five hours, one daily in May, two daily June to August).

Citylink has buses leaving Inverness for Thurso (£11.65, 3½ hours, four or five daily). The 2pm service connects with the 7pm ferry from Scrabster. You can connect with this service on early morning departures from Glasgow or Edinburgh, or London on the overnight coach departing around 11pm.

Getting Around

The *Orkney Public Transport Timetable,* offered free by the tourist offices, is invaluable. Note that bus services are very limited on Sunday in Orkney.

Orkney Coaches (☎ 01856-870555) runs bus services on Mainland and South Ronaldsay. It offers Rover passes for all services which cost £6/15 for one/three days and provides unlimited travel around the Orkneys on its buses. **Causeway Coaches** (☎ 01856-831444) runs to St Margaret's Hope on South Ronaldsay.

Orkney Ferries (☎ 01856-872044; www.orkneyferries.co.uk) operates interisland ferries throughout the Orkney Islands. They're not cheap, especially if you're taking a car – the standard return fare for your vehicle is around £17. Look out for special offers involving visits to three or more islands, which may include flights to places such as Papa Westray on Loganair. Destinations include North Isles (adult/child/car £12.80/6.40/28.60), Inner Isles Shapinsay, Hoy, Rounsay and Egilsay (adult/child/car £6.40/3.20/19.20).

KIRKWALL

☎ 01856 / pop 6206

If you're coming in from the outer islands Orkney's busy capital can seem a little too prim with its well-kept medieval town centre, but if you're heading further out this picturesque spot could be your last gasp of civilisation. Isolation has preserved the town's stunning centrepiece, St Magnus Cathedral, along with the nearby Earl's and Bishop's Palace. Founded in the early 11th century, the original precinct of Kirkwall is one of the best examples of an ancient Norse town.

Information

Kirkwall Library (Junction Rd) Free internet access.

Launderama (☎ 872982; 47 Albert St; service washes £6; 🕑 Mon-Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 872856; www.visitorkney.com; 6 Broad St; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Oct-Apr, daily May-Sep) Bureau de change, accommodation booking and a good range of publications on Orkney.

Sights

ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL

The heart of Kirkwall is **St Magnus Cathedral** (☎ 874894; admission free; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun

Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar), an incredible reddish monument. Its interior is especially impressive, with an eerie atmosphere of an ancient faith pervading the place. Its narrow nave is defined by sturdy rose-hued pillars and its aisles are flanked with blind arching. And if that doesn't impress, it's one of the world's only churches with a Viking longship on the altar. The red sandstone was quarried nearby and the more golden-coloured stones are from Eday. The result of 300 years of construction and several alterations, the cathedral includes Romanesque, transitional and Gothic styles.

The cathedral was commissioned in 1137 by Earl Rognvald Kolsson in honour of his uncle, Magnus Erlendsson, who was killed by his cousin during a squabble over control of Orkney. His bones were discovered in the 19th century in the rectangular pillars near the choir.

During summer, 40-minute **tours** (adult £5.50, ⏲ 11am & 2pm Tue & Thu) offer exclusive access to the upper levels.

EARL'S PALACE & BISHOP'S PALACE

Near the cathedral, these ruined **palaces** (☎ 871 918; Watergate; adult/child £3/1.30; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep) are sandstone treasures. The better of the two buildings is the Earl's Palace, once known as the finest example of Renaissance architecture in Scotland. One room contains an interesting history of its builder, Earl Patrick Stewart, who was executed in Edinburgh for treason. He started construction of the palace in about 1600 using forced labour, but ran out of money and the building was left uncompleted.

The Bishop's Palace was built in the mid-12th century to provide comfortable lodgings for Bishop William, and Norwegian King Hakkon the Old died here after a defeat at Largs. The tower affords views of the cathedral and a plaque showing the different phases of its construction.

ORKNEY MUSEUM

This restored **merchant's house** (☎ 873191; Broad St; admission free; ⏲ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun May-Sep, 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; ♿) details Orkney's history dating back to the first settlers more than 5000 years ago, and includes Pictish stones, 'bone' pins from Skara Brae and Iron Age jewellery. Don't skip the 19th- and 20-century displays as they include a mock schoolhouse and Orkney At War, which retells the story of the scuttling of German boats during WWII.

HIGHLAND PARK DISTILLERY

The whiff of malt and peat hits you before you get to this **distillery** (☎ 874619; www.highlandpark.co.uk; Holm Rd; guided tour adult/child £5/2.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & noon-5pm Sun May-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr, Sep & Oct), which produces a fine and accessible single malt in the world's most northerly whisky distillery (at least until the Shetlands distillery begins production). The first-rate tour (2pm Monday to Friday from November to March) walks you through the whole whisky-making process – this is one of the few distilleries that still does its own barley malting, meaning barley is left to lie for a week to become a green malt. The distillery's 18- and 25-year-old malts are well regarded.

Festivals

St Magnus Festival (☎ 871445; www.stmagnusfestival.com; 60 Victoria St, Kirkwall) is held every June with classical music, poetry and a popular conducting course. In 2006 the first **MagFest** was held, a younger version of the festival featuring Scottish bands.

Sleeping

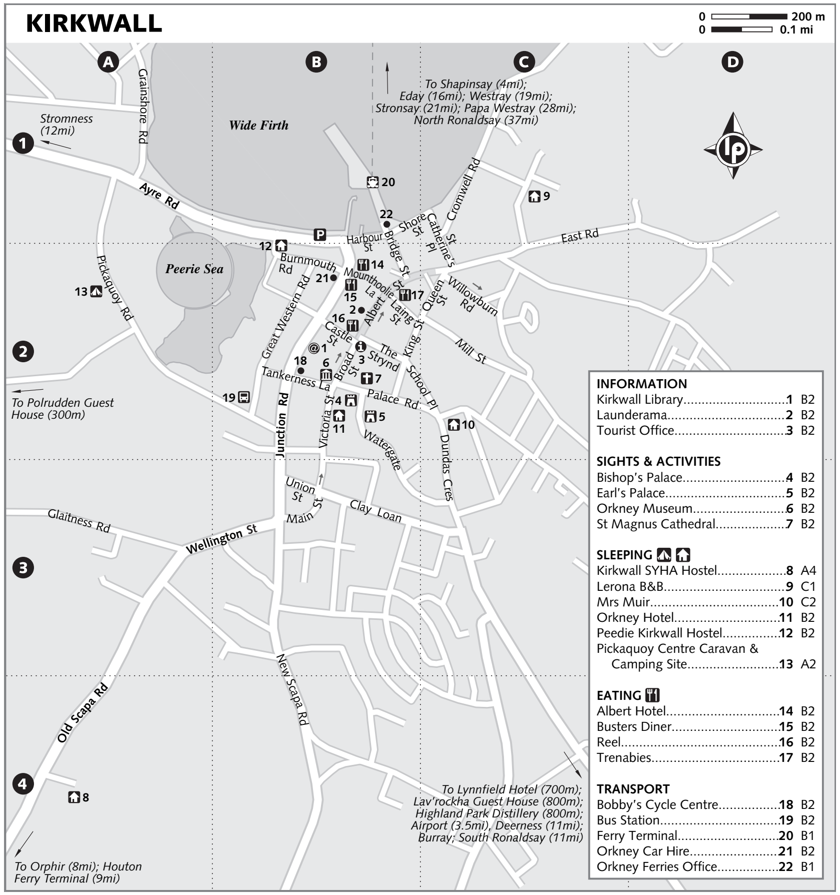
Accommodation is at affordable 'island' prices, but somewhat scarce – you'll need to book ahead in summer, especially around festival times.

BUDGET

Pickaquoy Centre Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 879 900; Pickaquoy Rd; small/large tent sites £4/7.20) On Kirkwall's western fringe, this camp site is a windswept place (dig those pegs deep) with plenty of grass and reasonable facilities.

Peedie Kirkwall Hostel (☎ 875477; 1 Ayre House, Ayre Rd; dm £12) If intimate is a euphemism for small, then this compact waterfront place is ultra-intimate. Space isn't really an issue though as three-bunk rooms feel private and the galley kitchen is cute (if crowded when there are two boxes of cereal).

Kirkwall SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1133; www.syha.org.uk; Old Scapa Rd; dm £13; ⏲ Apr-Sep; 💻) In a former barracks, this hostel is a 20-minute walk from the harbour on the edge of town, backing on to green fields. A friendly warden brightens up the place and a good-sized kitchen and sociable lounge make it ideal for solo travellers. There are a few problems – the long building can make for a long walk to the showers, and the lack of power outlets in rooms displays a reluctance to move into the age of mobile phones – but all up it makes for a good place to bunk down away from the town.


KIRKWALL
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0 0.1 mi
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
Wide Firth
Peerie Sea
To Shapinsay (4mi); Eday (16mi); Westray (19mi); Stronsay (21mi); Papa Westray (28mi); North Ronaldsay (37mi)
Stromness (12mi)
To Polrudden Guest House (300m)
To Lynnfield Hotel (700m); Lav'rockha Guest House (800m); Highland Park Distillery (800m); Airport (3.5mi); Deerness (11mi); Burray; South Ronaldsay (11mi)
To Orphir (8mi); Houton Ferry Terminal (9mi)
Grainshore Rd
Ayre Rd
Pickaquoy Rd
Burnmouth Rd
Great Western Rd
Harbour St
Bridge St
Shore St
Catherine's Pl
Cromwell Rd
East Rd
Mounthoolie La
Albert St
Laing St
Queen St
Willowburn Rd
Mill St
Castle St
The Strynd
King St
School Pl
Broad St
Tankerness La
Palace Rd
Victoria St
Junction Rd
Watergate
Dundas Cres
Union St
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Orkney Ferries Office 22 B1

MIDRANGE

Mrs Muir (☎ 874805; 2 Dundas Cres; s/d with shared bathroom £25/40) Elegant stained glass and impressive cathedral views are just two reasons to stay at this minimansion, but there are many more. Rooms are in peaceful whites and creams. Best of all Mrs M piles the shared breakfast table high with vegetarian or gluten-free dishes and a skip-lunch-sized full Scottish breakfast.

Lerona B&B (☎ 874538; Cromwell Cres; s £25, d £40-50) Brace yourself for some quaint overload at this enchanting B&B where the owners are nutty for gnomes ('I think they're breeding!'). You can find this place by the distinctive grotto crowded with the little fellas. Rooms are refreshingly plain with a light pinewood feel. Breakfast is in a sunny conservatory with plenty of fresh fruit.

Lav'rockha Guest House (☎ 876103; lavrockha@orkney.com; Inganess Rd; s/d from £40/55; P 💻 ♿) It's the details that make this spot one of the best guesthouses in the Orkneys. Spacious rooms, for example, all come with full-pressure showers, not the fiddly boxes that never deliver. The food is particularly good, not just breakfasts (which come with the choice of beef or pork sausages along with hash browns, cheeses and several other options) but also the award-winning dinners (three-course dinner £15.95), which are preceded by a drink in the lounge.

Polrudden Guest House (☎ 874 761; www.polrudden.com; Peerie Sea Loan; s/d £40/60; wi-fi) A little way out of town, the well-equipped rooms make this place worth the trip. Hip purple duvets complete the boldly decorated seven rooms that feature generous en suite bathrooms. The 1st-floor lounge is a good spot to relax with well-thumbed page-turners or board-game classics (anyone for Connect 4?).

TOP END

Orkney Hotel (☎ 873477; www.orkneyhotel.co.uk; 40 Victoria St; s/d £75/100; 💻 wi-fi) This historic hotel has been revitalised with shiraz-coloured walls in the foyer and wi-fi throughout, which makes it a popular spot with visiting businesspeople (the First Minister has used it as his Orkneys base in the past). While some rooms were yet to see a refit when we visited, others were impressively spacious and well equipped. The best bed is a four-poster with views of the cathedral.

Lynnfield Hotel (☎ 872595; Holm Rd; s/d £75/120) Within whiffing distance of the Highland Park Distillery, this recently refitted hotel will have you dizzy with its large rooms with four-post beds and top views (not to mention smells). With only 11 rooms it's an exclusive spot, with individual rooms featuring a Jacuzzi or antique writing desk. The restaurant is building a reputation, while the cosy dark-wood drawing room may have you wishing for rainy days.

Eating & Drinking

There are several places to eat around Bridge St, near the harbour.

our pick **Reel** (☎ 871000; 3 Castle St; snacks £2-4; 🕑 10am-6pm & later for gigs) Upstairs from a musical instrument shop, this place is a feast for all the senses: plush leather booths, folk music tinkling and a vase full of woodwind instruments in case you want to join in. You can slurp on massive coffee bowls and tuck into sandwiches and soups. The unmissable milkshakes are called Kula Shakers using real Orkney milk and cream.

Trenabies (☎ 874336; 16 Albert St; snacks £3.50-5, meals £5-9; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun, plus dinner Fri) With a comfy tearoom feel downstairs and a slicker bistro upstairs, this eatery flavours all its food with local produce. If you can, grab a spot upstairs to enjoy generous meals, especially the Mexican specials on Friday night.

Busters Diner (☎ 876717; 1 Mounthoolie Lane; meals £5-10; 🕑 5-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-9pm Sat, 5-9pm Sun) From Tex Mex to Big Apple hot dogs, this always-busy spot is a local interpretation of an American diner. You can expect burgers, dogs, pizzas and some pretty good tacos in a venue that's very kid friendly.

Albert Hotel (☎ 876000; Mounthoolie Lane; bar meals £7, mains £12-16; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The Albert Hotel has a reputation for good food, whether it's the good-value bar meals or gourmet meals at Stables. Local seafood is brilliantly done in this restaurant, with salmon and crab particularly tasty.

Getting There & Away

The **airport** (☎ 886210) is 2.5 miles from town. See p921 for flight information. For flights and ferries to the northern islands, see the individual islands.

From the bus station, Orkney Coaches runs to Stromness (40 minutes, four to 12 daily); Evie (40 minutes, four Monday to Saturday); Orphir and Houton (30 minutes, four to five Monday to Saturday); and Tingwall (30 minutes, up to three to five Monday to Saturday). Another route to Stromness goes via Birsay (one hour, one Monday and Thursday).

Bus 96 runs from Kirkwall to Tingwall (30 minutes, three to five daily Monday to Saturday) and the ferry to Rousay, and on to Evie (40 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday).

From May to September, bus 90 runs between Kirkwall and the John o'Groats ferry at Burwick (45 minutes, two to five daily). From June to September, a special tourist service (bus 98A) runs twice daily Monday to Friday between Kirkwall and Stromness via Stenness standing stones, the Ring of Brodgar and Skara Brae.

Getting Around

There are several car-rental places which charge around £35 per day: **Orkney Car Hire** (☎ 872866; www.orkneycarhire.co.uk; Junction Rd) and **Drive Orkney** (☎ 870000; www.driveorkney.com), while **Bobby's Cycle Centre** (☎ 875777; Tankerness Lane; 1-day hire £10) rents out mountain bikes.

WEST & NORTH MAINLAND

Stromness

☎ 01856 / pop 1609

Less of a chocolate-box streetscape than Kirkwall, Stromness is a rambling town with winding streets flanking the port and a picturesque flagstone-paved main street. The port's heyday was during the 18th century – it was a safe port when French fracas made the English Channel unsafe, particularly for trading ships bound for Canada. Driving the main street is a crawl (you're better off walking) past guesthouses, pubs and eateries. Although the town has few sights, many visitors prefer staying here than in Kirkwall.

Stromness Library (Hellihole Rd; 🕑 2-7pm Mon-Thu, 2-5pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 850716; 🕑 8am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, 1-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) In the ferry terminal and stays open later when ferries dock.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When a town's main attraction is watching boats coming and going in the harbour, you know it's going to be fairly relaxing. If you need a culture fix, **Stromness Museum** (☎ 850025; 52 Alfred St; adult/child £8/6; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) has a collection of oddments depicting the town's maritime heritage, including exhibits on whaling and the scuttled German High Seas fleet. If you've brought your MP3 player there's an excellent BBC podcast (www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/take_one/downloads.shtml) that takes you on a tour of the museum. When we visited, the **Arts Centre** (☎ 850209; www.pierartscentre.com; Ferry Rd; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sat) was closed for refurbishment but the collection of 20th-century art will be worth a look when it reopens in 2007.

If you're not content to just look at that water, **Scapa Scuba** (☎ 851218; www.scapascuba.co.uk; Lifeboat House, Dundas St; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-7pm Sat, 3-7pm Sun Apr-Oct) can get you under it with regular trips out to Scapa Flow (one-day dives from £150).

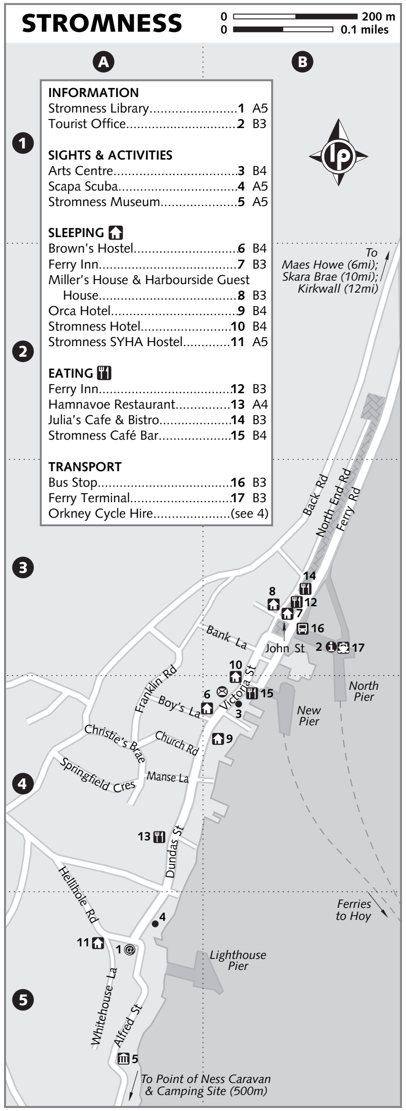
SLEEPING

Point of Ness Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 873535; tent sites £4.20-7.90) Fore! Backed by a golf course, this spacious camping area won't tee you off. It has plenty of room for big caravans, drinking water and some odd-looking picnic tables.

Brown's Hostel (☎ 850661; 45 Victoria St; dm £10-12; 💻) This central hostel is popular and homy with some of the rooms upstairs still featuring kids' toys and oddments. Some rooms can be a bit crammed, but the free internet is a real draw.

Stromness SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1150; www.syha.org.uk; Hellihole Rd; dm £10.50; 🕑 May-Sep) This freshly renovated hostel is unrecognisable from the old town hall where dances were once held. With four beds to a room, a spanking new kitchen and a patio area that has good views of town, this is one of the best budget bunks on the island.

Miller's House & Harbourside Guest House (☎ 851969; millershouse@orkney.com; 13 John St; s/d £28/46) It's between these two decorated houses (both operated by the same family) for the best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North End Rd
Ferry Rd
Bank La
John St
Franklin Rd
Victoria St
Boy's La
Christie's Brae
Church Rd
Springfield Cres
Manse La
Dundas St
Hellihole Rd
Whitehouse La
Alfred St
North Pier
New Pier
Lighthouse Pier
Ferries to Hoy
To Point of Ness Caravan & Camping Site (500m)

B&B in town. Miller's was one of the earliest places to offer accommodation in town. You should save room for the exceptional breakfasts which include several juices, excellent vegetarian options and daily baked bread (beer bread if you're lucky).

Stromness Hotel (☎ 850298; www.stromnesshotel.com; Victoria St; s/d from £48/96) A bit frayed around the edges, this towering hotel is a real relic of Stromness' glory days. Giant-window views are stunning and rooms are well preserved, but the lift is the best feature if you're on the upper floors.

Other recommendations:

Orca Hotel (☎ 851803; 76 Victoria St; r per person £20-25) Serviceable rooms with handy no-breakfast option if you're on a budget or shipping out early.

Ferry Inn (☎ 850280; www.ferryinn.com; John St; s/d £32/54) A harbourside spot with en-suite rooms and simpler options in a nearby annexe.

EATING & DRINKING

Julia's Café & Bistro (☎ 850904; 20 Ferry Rd; mains lunch £4-9, dinner £10-13; 🕐 café all day & dinner Wed-Sun) This bright spot by the port is always busy, especially in the conservatory when the sun is shining. Healthy breakfasts cater to the early ferry crowd, while lunches are wraps and salads. Dinners run to pastas and slightly more elaborate fare.

Ferry Inn (☎ 850280; John St; mains £6-15; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Everyone ends up in the Ferry, whether it's to drink the local brews (make ours an Orkney Dark Island if you're buying a round) or to sample the hefty portions at the restaurant, or for the legendary folk sessions. Daily specials spice up the menu, though the fish and chips is tough to beat when you're this close to the ocean.

Stromness Café Bar (☎ 850 551; 22 Victoria St; mains £7-10; 🕐 lunch & dinner daily) Tucked away in a cul-de-sac, this spot is decked out in bright colours and mosaics with a view across the water. The menu has a curiously Australian bent featuring delicacies such as kangaroo kebabs and matilda's monk, a local monkfish tossed with prawns and leeks.

Hamnavoe Restaurant (☎ 850606; 35 Graham Pl; mains £12-16; 🕐 dinner Wed-Sun Apr-Sep) The town's top table is laden with dishes such as monkfish, tangy with sweet pepper and pernod, or guinea fowl roasted with peaches in brandy. Local seafood is often dignified with some gourmet flair in this intimate dining room that also has one of the island's best wine lists. Service is a little disappointing, but you will have plenty of time to enjoy your food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Orkney Coaches runs to Kirkwall (40 minutes, four to 12 daily); and Birsay (25 minutes, one Monday and Thursday). From May to September there are three to four daily buses to Skara Brae (20 minutes).

For details on ferries to/from Scrabster and Lerwick, see p921. For ferry services to/from Aberdeen, see p864. For boats to Hoy, see p929.

GETTING AROUND

You can rent a well-maintained bike from **Orkney Cycle Hire** (☎ 850255; 54 Dundas St; 1-day £6).

Stenness

This hamlet is little more than a petrol station, a few houses and a hotel that prefaces the prehistoric monuments 1 mile east of here. It's easy to get here by bus as the road between Stromness and Kirkwall passes through here.

MAES HOWE

Built 3000 years before Egypt's pyramids, **Maes Howe** (☎ 01856-761606; adult/child £4/1.60; 🕐 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar) is the finest chambered tomb in Western Europe. A long stone passage leads into a chamber in the centre of an earth-covered mound, which contained the bones of two dozen dogs believed to have been sacred to the tribe who built this tomb.

During the winter solstice, Maes Howe reveals a mystical side as blood-red sunsets align with the passage, striking a cairn entrance at the rear of the chamber with alarming precision.

According to the *Orkneyinga Saga*, Vikings returning from the Crusades broke into the tomb searching for treasure. Finding none, they turned their attention to the walls, scribbling some curious graffiti, including some writing that you'd find in any schoolyard ('Olaf was 'ere') as well as some emblems of their recent quest including a crusader cross, a lion, a walrus and a knotted serpent.

Entry is by 45-minute guided tours that are timed to reduce crowds; book ahead in summer to ensure a place. Tickets are bought in Tormiston Mill, on the other side of the road, where there's a café, gift shop and small exhibition.

STANDING STONES OF STENNESS

Near Maes Howe stand four remaining **stones** (HS; admission free; 🕐 24hr) of the original 12 mighty boulders that once formed a ring. Fenced off from the world outside, the stones are impressive for their sheer size (one is over 5m high) and, of course, age: they were erected around 2500 BC.

RING OF BRODGAR

About a mile along the road from Stenness towards Skara Brae is a wide circle of **standing stones** (HS; admission free; 🕐 24hr), some over 5m tall. Originally 60 of the megaliths were on this site, but today just over 20 stones rise above the heather, with incidents like a lightning strike in the 1980s taking their toll on these worn monuments.

The ring remains eerie and it's worth walking around the stones to puzzle over what their different shapes could mean. You can get a few insights on a **ranger walk** (☎ 01856-841732; rangersorkneyrangers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk; 🕐 1pm Thu), a weekly tour that meets in the car park.

Skara Brae

Just 8 miles north of Stromness, **Skara Brae** (HS; ☎ 01856-841815; adult/child £5/2, joint ticket with Skaill House £6/2.40; 🕐 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar; ♿) is northern Europe's best-preserved prehistoric village. Predating the Pyramids of Giza and Stonehenge, it is staggeringly complete: even the stone furniture – beds, boxes and dressers – has survived the 4500 years since a community last lived here. This is largely due to the wind, which rapidly buried the buildings in sand once they were deserted, where they remained until 1850, when a severe storm ripped the top off the dunes, exposing the first unsuspected stones.

The interactive exhibition and short video are worth watching, as they provide information to enhance the impact of the site. Before heading for the site itself, inspect the reconstruction of a typical house, which brings the excavation brilliantly to life.

Your ticket is also valid for **Skaill House**, an early-17th-century mansion inhabited by William Watt, the founder of the village.

Private transport is the best way to get here, but from May to September there are three to four buses daily to and from Stromness.

Birsay

Before the Norse earls moved to Kirkwall, this small village was their capital and you can see their ruined might at **Earl's Palace** (HS; admission free; 🕐 24hr). Robert Stewart, scourge of Orkney peasants, built the palace in the 16th century and it's hard to imagine an archery range and bowling green among these ruins. It's an atmospheric spot, with honey-coloured walls and crumbling columns that suggest the tyranny of the former ruler.

At low tide you can stroll to the **Brough of Birsay** (HS; ☎ 01856-841815; adult/child £2/80p; 🕐 9.30am-6.30pm mid-Jun–Sep), almost a mile from the Earl's Palace. These ruins of a Norse settlement centre on the 12th-century St Peter's Church include several long houses.

If you'd like to stay near here, **Linkshouse** (☎ 01856-721221; www.ewaf.co.uk; The Palace, Birsay; s/d £35/56) is a well-kept stone house overlooking the sea and does ace breakfasts that can include homemade sausages and inventive vegetarian choices, such as sweetcorn pancakes.

Evie

Signposted from Evie is the **Broch of Gurness** (☎ 01856-751414; adult/child £3.30/1.30; 🕐 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep), the best example of a fortified stone tower to be found in Orkney. Built around 100 BC, this was one of Orkney's largest brochs, round towers that became common defences throughout Scotland during the Iron Age. Inside, you can see where a top

WORTH THE TRIP

If you're enjoying the history, a visit to **Wylie's Tearoom** (☎ 01856-771368; A896, Harray; mains £6-7.50; 🕐 8.30am-6.30pm) in the township of Harray is essential. The décor isn't worth mentioning, apart from some decorative bottles and gas masks, but the food is old-fashioned country tearoom favourites. If you can't decide between the cakes, slices, scones and other fancies, opt for the tiffin (£2.50), which gives you a generous serve of everything to dunk in your tea. Wylie's makes its own chutney, scones, pikelets, various slices and chunks of cake, but you can also try Orkney classics such as herring in oatmeal and breaded haddock. Like anything worth seeing on Mainland, it periodically gets invaded by tour buses so time your visit to avoid popular times.

floor and roof once were as well as the hearth which would have been vital to warm this building. Surrounding the broch are house ruins, marked by hearths in the centre of each. The small visitors centre helps unravel the mysteries of this ancient culture.

Eviedale Cottages & Campsite (☎ 01856-751270; camp sites £4-7, bothy bunks £5, self-catering cottages per week £190-310; 🕐 camp site Apr-Sep) has a good grassy area for camping with picnic tables, and a rudimentary bothy with four bunk-beds but no showers. Next door, self-catering farm cottages provide superior country-style accommodation.

Accessed from a road near the Tingwall ferry dock, **Woodwick House** (☎ 01856-751330; www.woodwickhouse.co.uk; Woodwick Bay; s from £32, d £64-92) is a country-house hotel with few pretensions despite some impressive décor. Spacious rooms and extensive gardens enhance this property's charm. The pricier doubles include en suite bathrooms, but otherwise sharing isn't inconvenient. Home-cooked dinners (£25) are gourmet affairs that fill even the biggest belly.

EAST MAINLAND, BURRAY & SOUTH RONALDSAY

When a German U-boat scuppered the battleship HMS *Royal Oak* right under the Allied noses in Scapa Flow in 1939, Sir Winston Churchill decided it was time to better protect this naval base. Using concrete blocks and discarded ships, the channels between Lamb Holm, Glimps Holm, Burray, South Ronaldsay and Mainland were blocked. To honour Winnie, they were named the **Churchill Barriers**, and today they link the islands; you'll drive over them as you head north from the ferry. If you fancy a paddle, there are good sandy beaches by Barrier 3 and 4.

As you head across the island of Lamb Holm you'll catch the bright colours of the **Italian Chapel** (☎ 01856-781268; admission free; 🕐 9am-10pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4.30pm Oct-Mar), the only evidence that remains of the people who built the barriers, Italian prisoners of war (POWs). Using scraps and two Nissen huts, they built this colourful emblem to their faith during extremely difficult times.

On the far eastern shore a mile north of Skaill (at the end of the Deerness Rd) is the **Gloup**, a spectacular natural arch and sea cave, which is popular with nesting sea birds, especially playful puffins. On a farm at Tankerness is the mysterious **Mine Howe** (☎ 861234; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕐 10am-3pm Wed, Fri & Sun May, 10am-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 11am-4pm daily early Sep, 10am-2pm Wed, Fri & Sun late Sep), an Iron Age site made famous by an excavation in the *Time Team* TV series, which concluded only that this site may have been an oracle or shrine.

Run by local farmers, the **Tomb of the Eagles** (☎ 01856-831339; Liddle Farm, Isbister; adult/child £5/3; 🕐 10am-noon Mar, 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, by arrangement Nov-Feb) at the southern tip of South Ronaldsay is worth visiting. The 5000-year-old burial chamber was discovered by the same local farmers who now offer well-informed guided tours. A number of sea eagle claws and bones were found within the tomb, possibly indicating that the group revered the bird as a totem; other tombs on the island have revealed remains of different animals. Other theories speculate that sky burials were performed here.

The main village on South Ronaldsay is **St Margaret's Hope**, named after Margaret, the Maid of Norway, who was to have married Edward II of England but is thought to have died here in 1290 en route to the wedding. The town is an attractive stone-built port that serves as the terminus for the cheaper of the two Mainland car ferries.

Sleeping & Eating

Murray Arms Hotel & Backpacker's Hostel (☎ 01856-831205; murrayarms@freeuk.com; St Margaret's Hope; dm £11, hotel s/tw £33/66) This lovely stone cottage has a decent dorm, as well as a single and twins. The hotel itself has more upmarket rooms which are even closer to the congenial pub that serves tasty pub meals (meals £5 to £9) for lunch and dinner.

Creel Inn & Restaurant (☎ 01856-831311; www.thecreel.co.uk; Front Rd, St Margaret's Hope; mains £18; 🕐 dinner) In an unassuming house, one of Scotland's best seafood restaurants has been winning awards and hearts for more than 20 years. Here you can feast on hand-dived scallops or North Ronaldsay's seaweed-fed lamb, and colourfully named local fish such as wolf fish and sea-witch. But it doesn't stop there, because they've got three elegant en-suite rooms (singles/doubles £60/90) which all have panoramic sea views.

Getting There & Away

Causeway Coaches travels between Kirkwall and St Margaret's Hope (30 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday, one Sunday). Orkney Coaches runs the Kirkwall–Burwick service (50 minutes, two daily) which connects with the ferries. For ferry information, see p921.

HOY

☎ 01856 / pop 392

The Norse word *Haey* (meaning High Island) gave this lofty island its name, but it's more than altitude that lends the second-largest of the Orkneys its beauty. The sea has spectacularly nibbled at this coastline creating not just jaw-dropping cliffs and turquoise bays, but also unique stacks and rock formations.

Best of all, because this island is only 14 miles across at its longest point, you can get to this dramatic landscape with or without your own vehicle. If your camera is twitching for cliff scenery, **St John's Head** (346m) on the west coast is one of Britain's highest vertical cliffs. The equally photogenic **Old Man of Hoy**, a 137m-high sea stack, is the island's best-known sight and is considered a real challenge for advanced rock climbers. The finest scenery is in the north of the island, a large part of which forms the **North Hoy RSPB Reserve**, where you can see fulmars, kittiwakes, great skuas and other sea birds.

One of the island's more popular walks follows the cliff edge opposite the Old Man of Hoy. Allow about seven hours for the return trip from Moaness Pier where the ferries dock. Alternatively, you can hike a circuit to the Old Man that goes via the **Dwarfie Stone** (HS; admission free), a squat tomb carved into a single block of sandstone in 3000 BC.

The car ferry from Mainland arrives at Lyness, which was a base for the British Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow until 1956. **Scapa Flow Visitor Centre** (☎ 791300; admission by donation; 🕐 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep) tells the story of this base that served through two World Wars. It's a fascinating naval museum incorporating a photographic display in an old pumphouse. Most interesting is the account of the sinking of the German High Seas Fleet after WWI; there's also a cheerful little café.

Sleeping & Eating

There's good accommodation in Rackwick, but you can find some real gems by going further afield.

Rackwick SYHA Hostel (☎ 873535, ext 2415; www.syha.org.uk; Rackwick; dm £9.50; 🕐 early Mar-late Sep) Almost at the start of the walk to the Old Man, this snug hostel has four bunks and appeals to walkers, who need to bring their own sleeping bags and supplies. It's the kind of casual place where the warden wanders around in the evening to collect your cash.

Hoy Youth Hostel (☎ 873535; Moaness; dm adult/child £12/8; 🕐 May–mid-Sep) Recently refurbished, this trim hostel is just 15 minutes' walk from Moaness Pier and at the base of the rugged Cuilags. You'll need your own sleeping bag and supplies for the en-suite six-bed dorms.

Stoneyquoy Farm (☎ 791234; www.visithoy.com; r per person £20; 💻) This endearing farmhouse, between Lyness and Longhope, has Dutch-Orcadian hosts who put on a great breakfast; they also offer a great dinner option if you don't want to go back to town. The working farm is just 3 miles out of Lyness.

Stromabank Hotel (☎ 701494; www.stromabank.co.uk; Longhope; bar meals £6-9; 🕐 lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri-Wed) One of Hoy's few eateries, this pub does good steaks and pies but has surprising specials such as crab cakes with sweet chilli sauce. The location is beautifully remote, though on a clear day locals reckon you can see mainland Scotland (before you start drinking, after which the view gets foggier).

Getting There & Away

A **passenger ferry** (☎ 850624) operates between Stromness and Moaness Pier (single per person/bicycle £3/60p, 30 minutes, two to five daily May to September). There's a reduced schedule from October to April.

Orkney Ferries (☎ 811397) also sails to Lyness (Hoy) from Houton on Mainland (single per person/car £3.20/9.60, three to six daily). The more limited Sunday service runs from May to late September. Flotta and Houton are 20 minutes and 35 minutes from Lyness, respectively.

NORTHERN ISLANDS

This group of windswept islands is a refuge for migrating birds and a nesting ground for sea birds; there are several RSPB reserves. Some of the islands are also rich in archaeological sites. However, the beautiful scenery, with wonderful white-sand beaches and lime-green to azure seas, is the main attraction.

The tourist offices in both Kirkwall and Stromness have a useful brochure, *The Islands of Orkney*, which includes maps and details of these islands. Note that the pronunciation of the 'ay' ending of each island name is 'ee' (eg Shapinsay is pronounced Shapinsee).

Shapinsay

☎ 01856 / pop 300

A 20-minute ferry trip from Kirkwall, this fertile island with its magnificent castle and basking seals makes for a brilliant day trip. **Balfour Castle** (☎ 711282; www.balfourcastle.com; tour incl return ferry adult/child £18/9) was designed as a calendar house, as it has seven turrets, 12 exterior doors, 52 rooms and 365 panes of glass. Tours of the castle (2.15pm Sunday May to September; book in advance) will take you inside to admire the birds under glass and the sweet wee chapel, and finish with Orcadian afternoon tea made from produce from the expansive gardens. If you want to feel like royalty, you can stay in stately Victorian rooms (doubles £240) with predinner drinks in the historic library and views of the ferry sailing to Kirkwall.

Otherwise you can enjoy a cup of tea and scone at the **Smithy** (☎ 711722; www.shapinsaysmithy.com; snacks £2-5, meals £6-9; 🕐 lunch & dinner), a rustic old-stone blacksmiths that was in use until the 1950s. The coffee comes with tasty shortbread and there's a daily changing blackboard menu of haddock, curries and chicken roast.

Orkney Ferries operates a ferry from Kirkwall (per person/car £3.20/9.60, 25 minutes, five to six daily May to September) with limited services in winter.

Rousay

☎ 01856 / pop 267

Called 'the Egypt of the North' for its many archaeological sites, this rugged, wind-lashed island is close enough to Mainland's Tingwall that it serves as a intriguing stepping stone on the way to Egilsay and Wyre. The hilly terrain presents a moderate challenge to walkers who take the two trails into the **Trumland RSPB Reserve**, where they may hear the distinctive call of the rare corncrake. There are three lochs for trout fishing.

Heading west from the ferry pier at Brinian, you'll strike three significant cairns: the burial mound of **Taversoe Tuick**, a rare example of two-level construction, and the cairns of **Knowe of Yarso** and **Blackhammer**.

If you keep following the road (roughly 5.5 miles from the pier), you'll come to the 'Great Ship of Death', **Midhowe Cairn**, which held the remains of 25 people in the longest chambered cairn in Orkney, which dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. Nearby, **Midhowe Broch** is a daunting prehistoric fortress that once defended Eynhallow Sound.

Wandering the mile from Midhowe Cairn to Westness Farm, you'll span 5000 years of Orkney history, passing Viking and Pictish burial sites, prehistoric brochs and knowes (burial mounds), and several noble ruins from the 16th to 19th centuries. The leaflet *Westness Walk,* available from tourist offices on Mainland, details the route.

SLEEPING & EATING

Trumland Farm Hostel (☎ 821252; Trumland Farm; camp sites £4, dm £8, bedding £2 extra, cottages £60) This organic farm, just half a mile west of the ferry, has two comfortable but cramped six-bed dorms. The well-equipped cottage is a good option for self-caterers, and if you're on a budget you can pitch tents on the grass outside and use the hostel facilities. Bike hire (£7) is available.

Taversoe Hotel (☎ 821325; d £60) Just 2 miles southwest of the pier (pick-ups are available if you don't have your own transport), this freshly refurbished hotel has three simply decorated rooms with stress-reducing views of the water. The best panoramic vistas are from the dining room, which serves homemade meals and pizzas.

Pier Restaurant (☎ 821359; meals £4-7; 🕐 11am-9pm Mon-Sat; 💻) This restaurant by the ferry pier is an ideal spot for homy bar meals, a coffee or whisky while waiting for the ferry, or a chat and a game of pool after a long day's walking. There's also internet access.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

A small **car ferry** (☎ 751360) connects Tingwall (Mainland) with Brinian on Rousay (single per person/car £3.20/9.60, 30 minutes, five to six daily) and the other nearby islands of Egilsay and Wyre.

Rousay's single road makes a pleasant, slightly hilly circuit of about 14 miles, best ridden on a bike from Trumland Farm.

Egilsay & Wyre

These two small islands nestle east of Rousay. On Egilsay, a **cenotaph** marks the spot where Earl Magnus was murdered in 1117. After his martyrdom, pilgrims inspired the building of **St Magnus Church**, now missing its conical roof but otherwise intact. Today, much of the island is an **RSPB reserve**.

In the mid-12th century the neighbouring island of Wyre was the domain of the Viking baron Kolbein Hruga (Cubbie Roo). The ruins of his **castle** and **St Mary's Chapel** can be visited for free. Wyre's serene western sliver virtually guarantees seal sightings.

Both islands are reached on the Rousay–Tingwall ferry (see opposite). Booking the ferry is mandatory for the return journey.

Stronsay

☎ 01857 / pop 358

Shaped like a bent crucifix, Stronsay attracts walkers and cyclists for its lack of serious inclines, and beautiful landscapes over its four curving bays. You can spot wildlife, with chubby seals basking on the rocks, and a healthy bird population, particularly puffins and sea birds. There are good coastal walks and, in the east, the **Vat o'Kirbister** is the best example of a *gloup* (natural arch) in Orkney.

Right next to the ferry dock at Whitehall, **Stronsay Fish Mart** (☎ 616386; Whitehall; admission free; 🕐 11am-6pm Mon & Wed, 11am-7pm Thu-Sat & 10am-7pm Sun May-Sep) now houses a herring-industry museum, which recalls the vital role fishing once played to the island. The attached 10-bed hostel (dorm bed £10) is well run if a little soulless, while the café serves up simple snacks and takeaways.

For good pub grub and some well refurbished rooms, **Stronsay Hotel** (☎ 616213; www.stronsayhotel.com; Whitehall; s/d from £25/50; ♿) is recommended. The menu includes great seafood (including paella and lobster) and there are packed lunches for walkers.

Flights from Kirkwall (one way £31, 20 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday) are operated by BA/Loganair.

Orkney Ferries links Stronsay with Kirkwall (single per person/car £6.40/14.30, 1½ hours, two daily) and Eday (single passenger/car £6.40/14.30, 35 minutes, one Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday).

Eday

☎ 01857 / pop 121

At only 8 miles long, Eday has a heathered hilly interior and cultivated fields around its coast, but no central town. Occupied for at least the last 5000 years, today Eday has been left to the dead with numerous chambered cairns and the scenically located standing stones, the **Stone of Setter**.

It's worth getting hold of the *Eday Heritage Walk* leaflet, which details an interesting four-hour ramble from the Eday shop near the ferry pier to the sandstone **Red Head** on the island's north.

Four miles from the ferry, the 24-bed **Eday SYHA Hostel** (☎ 622206; www.syha.org.uk; London Bay; dm £8; 🕐 Apr-Sep) is an austere affair with minimal facilities (you'll need your own sleeping bag though sleeping sheets are provided).

Pirate Gow Chalets (☎ 622285; Southcott; cottages per week £95) offers five comfy cottages with postcard sea-views and fully equipped kitchens. Shorter stays are available depending on bookings.

BA/Loganair flies from Kirkwall (one way £31, 30 minutes, two flights every Wednesday only) to London airport – that's London on Eday. The ferry service from Kirkwall sails via Stronsay (passenger/car £6.40/14.30, 1½ hours, two daily). There's also a link between Sanday and Eday.

Sanday

☎ 01857 / pop 478

With some of Orkney's best golden **beaches**, you'd be forgiven for skipping the island's history. This 12-mile island, however, is a time capsule of Neolithic, Pictish and Viking ruins. The most impressive of the archaeological sights is **Quoyness Chambered Tomb**, a burial site similar to Maes Howe (p926). At the northeastern tip of Sanday, there's **Tafts Ness**, with around 500 prehistoric burial mounds. On the northeastern extreme, the black-and-white-striped **Start Point Lighthouse** (another Robert Stevenson creation) marks out an area that claimed several ships, with locals using shipwrecks to make fences and homes.

Kettletoft Hotel (☎/fax 600217; www.kettletofthotel.com; Kettletoft; s/d £25/60) is a friendly pub with several well-appointed rooms in the middle of this little portside village. Meals in the bar (£7) also lean seaward, with plenty of fresh fish and even lobster scuttling into some dishes.

BA/Loganair flies from Kirkwall (one way £31, 20 minutes, two Monday to Saturday) to Sanday and Westray. Orkney Ferries operates a service between Kirkwall and Sanday (return per person/car £6.40/14.30, 1½ hours, two daily, May to mid-September). There's also a link to Eday.

Westray

☎ 01857 / pop 700

Despite its remoteness this tiny island wears the Queen of the Northern Isles crown, for its population density, agricultural wealth and vibrant fishing industry. Visitors come for prehistoric sites, sandy beaches, cliff scenery and the ruins of the 6th-century **Noltland Castle** (HS; admission free; 🕑 9.30am-6.30pm mid-Jun–Sep). This Z-plan towerhouse has a formidable array of shot holes, including two canon mounts in the kitchen to defend its deceitful owner Gilbert Balfour, who plotted to murder Cardinal Beaton and, after being exiled, the King of Sweden. In the northwest, **Noup Head RSPB Reserve** attracts tens of thousands of breeding sea birds each year, including a sizeable puffin posse.

The main village, **Pierowall**, is one of the best natural harbours in the Orkneys, which made it a strategic Viking base in the past. Ferries from Kirkwall dock at Rapness, about 7 miles south of Pierowall.

SLEEPING & EATING

Barn (☎ 677214; www.thebarnwestray.com; Chalmersquoy, Pierowall; tent sites/dm/f £6/11.75/40; ♿) Once a threshing barn, this intimate hostel has been comfortably refitted with plenty of facilities including huge storage cupboards and a DVD collection for when the weather is bad. Bike hire (per day £5) is available and a large family room is a good option for cheap clan holidays.

our pick **Bis Geos Hostel** (☎ 677420; www.bis-geos.co.uk; Bis Geos; dm £11, cottages per week from £140; 🕑 Apr-Oct; 💻) This is unquestionably Orkney's best hostel and it's worth the trip to Westray just to bunk down in this unique environ. The hostel is decked out in a nautical theme with ropes, whalebones and old sails, but that doesn't mean you sacrifice comfort, with a kitchen full of shiny appliances and a selection of videos. Bunks are individually curtained with rustic hessian and have shelves for alarm clocks and valuables. Views across a small sculptured garden look out over the cliffs and there's some thoughtfully provided binoculars. For a little more privacy, the cottages sleep two to five people comfortably and come with great extras such as CD players, videos and a sauna that looks out over the cliffs.

Cleaton House Hotel (☎ 677508; www.cleatonhouse.co.uk; Cleaton; s/d £55/80) This delightful hotel offers a relaxed slice of island life, from the drawing room complete with stereo and a few good books to the pleasant pub with idyllic views of the bay and several local ales to sample. Rooms are all spacious, but our pick is the Bis Geos suite which overlooks the sea.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information on flights see Sanday, p931. Orkney Ferries links Kirkwall with Rapness on Westray (single per person/car 6.40/14.30, 1½ hours, two daily) and Papa Westray.

Papa Westray

☎ 01857 / pop 65

Oddly this island is smaller than Westray at just 4 miles long and 1 mile wide. Nevertheless, the island attracts plenty of superlatives: Europe's oldest domestic building is the **Knap of Howar** (built about 5500 years ago); the world's shortest scheduled flight is the two-minute hop across Papa Sound from Westray; and Europe's largest colony of Arctic terns is at **North Hill RSPB Reserve**. Papa Westray was also the cradle of Christianity in Orkney – the restored **St Boniface Kirk** was founded in the 8th century and still impresses with its fine restored 12th-century stonework and ancient emanations.

Just over a mile north of the ferry terminal at Beltane, **Beltane House Hotel** (☎ 644267; papaybeltane2@hotmail.com; dm £10, s/d £27/50) successfully combines hostel and hotel with cosy dorms and new en-suite rooms. Hefty platefuls of local beef and seafood make satisfying lunch and dinner meals (from £7), but there's also a shop here if you're self-catering.

Flying to the island of Papa Westray (£15, 15 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday) or North Ronaldsay (£15, 25 minutes, two daily except for three on Wednesday and one on Sunday) from Kirkwall is an amazing deal compared with other flights in the Orkneys – about twice the distance for half the price.

Private operators also make the run from Rackwick in Westray to Papa; try calling the reliable **Jim Hewitson** (☎ 644268), who heads across daily for less than £10.

North Ronaldsay

☎ 01857 / pop 50

Even in the Orkneys, North Ronaldsay is a byword for isolation. Electricity was only wired up here in the 1980s and there are 40 sheep to every single human inhabitant. Sheep are kept at bay by a 13-mile **dry stone wall** across the flat island which stops them from nibbling on crops. Instead the toughened sheep eat seaweed, which gives their meat a unique flavour that's worth sampling if you can.

The island falls in the path of migratory birds, which in turn bring fanatical birders who spot whole chapters of *What Bird Is That?* nesting or flying over this 3-mile long island. Seals are common and whales have been seen.

With solar and wind power, the environmentally friendly **Observatory Guest House** (☎ 633200; www.nrbo.f2s.com; dm £11, s/d from £31/51; 💻) has minimal impact on the fragile local environment. It's especially designed for birdwatchers, for whom various ranger-led activities are organised. There are dorm rooms as well as en-suite twins and doubles; dinner, which can feature the unique local mutton, is available for an extra £10. The attached **Obscafé** (meals £4-8; 🕑 lunch & dinner) does good meals for all visitors, and life-affirming coffee in the cold.

See Papa Westray (opposite) for details of flights. Orkney Ferries operates a service from Kirkwall (return per person/car £6.40/14.30, 2¾ hours, one on Friday only, plus every second Sunday from late May to August).

SHETLAND ISLANDS

Closer to Oslo than Glasgow, the Shetlands are adrift in the North Sea and were under Norse rule until 1469. Someone forgot to tell the locals about the handover because their Norwegian-tinged accents are frequently heard on the topic of 'making the trip down to Scotland' – when they're not burning a Viking galley at the annual Up Helly Aa festival.

Visitors to the remote islands usually pack binoculars to spot local birds or wildlife at Sumburgh Head, and carry backpacks stuffed with Gortex to protect against the notoriously changeable weather on hikes to the extreme north of Hermaness. Locals reckon that the length of the islands means that you can fly into sunny Sumburgh and be shrouded in fog before you get to the Shetland's biggest town, Lerwick, just 25 miles away. The rugged landscape includes sheer ski-jump cliffs that are fuzzed with green and dotted with whitewashed homes and the famous toylike ponies. The largest of the 15 inhabited islands is Mainland, and from here it's an easy hop to Yell and Unst, but there are more than 100 islands to explore along the scattered archipelago.

Oil rigs to the North Sea and semisecret military bases have kept the Shetlands economically viable in a way that woolly sweaters and cute ponies could never hope to, but the islands are developing a reputation as a tourist escape. New cheap flights have led Sunday supplement writers to waggishly call the Shetlands the 'New Maldives', but after you've seen the Viking ruins of Jarlshof or Scotland's best-preserved Iron Age tower, Moussa Broch, you'll have the feeling that you've been somewhere other than Scotland.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The oil industry ensures that air connections are good. The main airport is at Sumburgh, 25 miles south of Lerwick. **BA/Loganair** (☎ 01595-840246; www.ba.com) operates flights to/from Aberdeen (return from £165, one hour, two to four daily). **Highland Airways** (☎ 0845 450 2245; www.highlandairways.co.uk) also runs flights from Inverness. BA/Loganair also operates a low-flying turboprop aircraft between Orkney and Shetland (from £85.20, 40 minutes, one daily). **Atlantic Airways** (☎ 020 7823 4242; www.atlantic.fo) flies twice weekly from London in an experimental flight (one hour 40 minutes). Even in summer flights

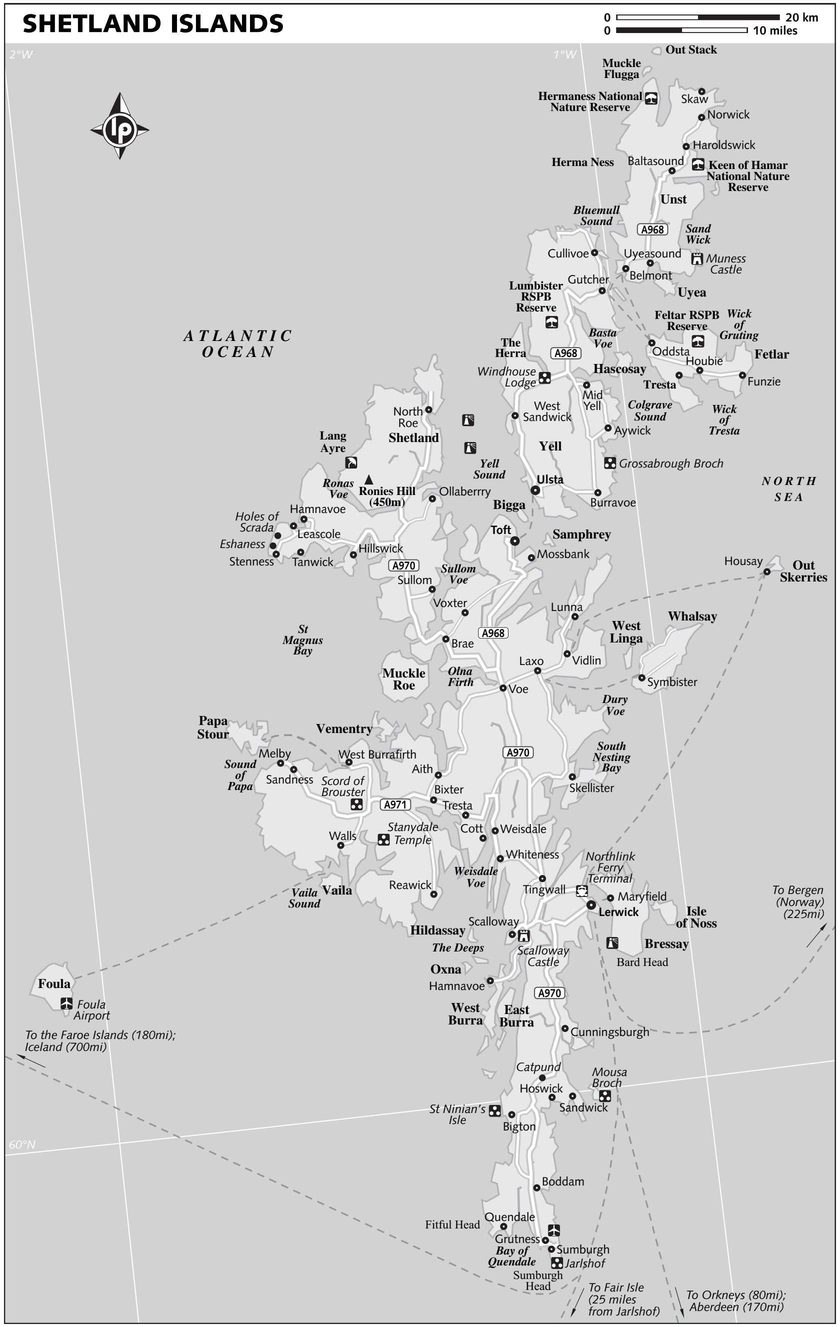
YOU CAN'T TAKE THE BOY OUT OF SHETLAND

Shetlanders have a strong sense of community and certainly look after their own. When Britain decided to deport immigrants with criminal records in 2006 it made the mistake of targeting a 23-year-old Shetlander.

Sakchai Makao was born in Thailand, but moved to the Shetlands before he was 10. His criminal offence was petty arson, which occurred when Makao was coming to terms with the death of his father. The Home Office branded him a criminal and sent special constables to remove him from his job as a lifeguard, to Aberdeen. Makao's first response was to call his best friend from jail to tell him he might not be able to be his best man.

But Shetlanders mobilised to 'Save Sakchai', as the posters which filled every shop window read. Various fundraisers were held to finance his appeal including selling T-shirts and a 50p 'race' (where coins are lined end-to-end for the length of an oval). A local MP and the musician Elvis Costello wrote letters of support for Sakchai's defence and the *Scotsman* called the Shetlands 'a community in revolt'. After several months, the campaign met with success, and Makao was allowed to return to the Shetlands and his lifeguard job.

SHETLAND ISLANDS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Bluemull Sound
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Sand Wick
Cullivoe
Uyeasound
Muness Castle
Belmont
Gutcher
Uyea
Lumbister RSPB Reserve
Feltar RSPB Reserve
Wick of Gruting
Basta Voe
Oddsta
Houbie
Fetlar
The Herra
A968
Hascosay
Windhouse Lodge
Tresta
Funzie
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Mid Yell
West Sandwick
Colgrave Sound
Aywick
Wick of Tresta
North Roe
Shetland
Lang Ayre
Yell
Grossabrough Broch
Yell Sound
Ronas Voe
Ronies Hill (450m)
Ulsta
NORTH SEA
Ollaberrry
Hamnavoe
Bigga
Burravoe
Holes of Scrada
Leascole
Toft
Samphrey
Eshaness
Hillswick
Mossbank
Stenness
Tanwick
A970
Sullom Voe
Housay
Out Skerries
Sullom
Voxter
Lunna
Whalsay
St Magnus Bay
West Linga
A968
Brae
Vidlin
Laxo
Muckle Roe
Olna Firth
Symbister
Voe
Dury Voe
Papa Stour
Vementry
Melby
West Burrafirth
A970
South Nesting Bay
Sound of Papa
Sandness
Scord of Brouster
Aith
Bixter
Skellister
A971
Tresta
Walls
Stanydale Temple
Cott
Weisdale
Whiteness
Northlink Ferry Terminal
Weisdale Voe
Reawick
Tingwall
Maryfield
Vaila Sound
Vaila
Lerwick
Isle of Noss
To Bergen (Norway) (225mi)
Scalloway
Hildassay
The Deeps
Scalloway Castle
Bressay
Bard Head
Oxna
Hamnavoe
Foula
Foula Airport
A970
West Burra
East Burra
Cunningsburgh
To the Faroe Islands (180mi); Iceland (700mi)
Catpund
Mousa Broch
Hoswick
St Ninian's Isle
Sandwick
Bigton
Boddam
Fitful Head
Quendale
Grutness
Bay of Quendale
Sumburgh
Jarlshof
Sumburgh Head
To Fair Isle (25 miles from Jarlshof)
To Orkneys (80mi); Aberdeen (170mi)

can be weather dependent, but the airlines will move you to a ferry if all goes wrong.

BOAT

NorthLink Ferries (☎ 01856-851144; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) runs car ferries between Lerwick and Aberdeen (single passenger £19.25 to £29.50, car and driver £100 to £135 single, cabins extra, 12 to 15 hours, daily) via Kirkwall. For details of the ferry link between the Shetland Islands and Bergen (Norway) see p921.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

On a fine day, cycling is the way to hop around small distances in the Shetlands, but in bad weather shelter can be scarce and winds are fierce. Bike-hire outfits include **Grantfield Garage** (☎ 01595-692709; North Rd, Lerwick; 1-day hire £7.50) and **Lerwick Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 01595-692114; www.syha.org.uk; King Harald St; 1-day hire £7).

BUS

There are several bus operators available; for information on all their services call ☎ 01595-694100.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Thanks to the oil infrastructure, Shetland's roads are wide and well kept. If you're thinking of hiring a car, book ahead, as Lerwick's four companies can book out well in advance. Prices are from £25 per day:

Bolts Car Hire (☎ 01595-693636; 26 North Rd, Lerwick)
Grantfield Garage (☎ 01595-692709; North Rd, Lerwick)
John Leask & Son (☎ 01595-693162; leasks@zetnet.co.uk; Esplanade, Lerwick)
Star Rent-a-Car (☎ 01595-692075; www.starrentacar.co.uk; 22 Commercial Rd, Lerwick)

Call **Allied Taxis** (☎ 01595-690069) for a cab; it will cost about £35 to travel from Sumburgh airport to Lerwick.

LERWICK

☎ 01595 / pop 6830

The largest town in Shetland is dug into the hills of Bressay Sound and was once the UK's biggest herring port. The tough nut of Fort Charlotte is a testament to the town's strategic importance, though more recently life has come to centre on the pier, with changing-over oil rig crews or large ocean liners enjoying a day in port. Either way it's a contradictory spot, being the main maritime entry into the Shetlands from northern Europe or the Orkneys and, equally, a good place to spot seals or the odd wandering whale.

Information

Shetland Library (☎ 693868; Lower Hillhead; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-5pm Tue, Thu & Sat) Free internet access.
Support Training (☎ 695026; 6a Mounthooly St; per hr £2; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Internet access.
Tourist office (☎ 693434; www.visitshetland.com; Market Cross; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) Bureau de change and excellent range of books, maps and brochures.

Sights & Activities

Keeping an iron rule over the town, **Fort Charlotte** (admission free; 🕒 9.30am-dusk) is a cannoned battlement that was once a good vantage point for watching for an invading Dutch navy. Today it provides a base for the Territorial Army and the only potential invaders are seals basking in the harbour.

A visit to the **Up-Helly-Aa Exhibition** (St Sunniva St; adult/child £3/1; 🕒 2-4pm & 7-9pm Tue, 7-9pm Fri, 2-4pm Sat mid-May–mid-Sep) is essential to make sense of 'Shetlandness'. Here you can see the construction of the Viking galley that will be burnt at the annual Viking fire festival (see p936).

Drop into the **Shetland Museum** (☎ 695057; www.shetland-museum.org.uk; Lower Hillhead; admission free; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-5pm Tue, Thu & Sat) for an introduction to the islands' 5000-year history. Inside are terrific exhibits on Shetland's fishing heritage, along with medieval pottery, grisly human remains and fine examples of Pictish stone carvings. It's currently undergoing renovation, so opening may be erratic. Oddly handy to the town centre, **Clickimin Broch** (admission free; 🕒 24hr) is secluded by a small loch and was occupied from the 7th century BC to the 6th century AD as a military fort.

Böd of Gremista Museum (☎ 695057; admission free; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Wed-Sun Jun–mid-Sep) has been restored as an 18th-century fishing booth with plenty of memorabilia and a chatty guide who sounds like he remembers the golden age of fishing.

Tours

The following tours depart from the tourist office.

Dim Riv (☎ 07970 864189; adult/child £5/2, 🕒 7pm Mon & 3pm Sun) If you're feeling historical, sail in a reconstructed Viking longship that takes to the bay.

Island Trails (☎ 422408; www.island-trails.co.uk; 1hr tour £10) One of the best ways to see Lerwick; with local historian Douglas Sinclair or a traditional tour with Elma.

Seabirds & Seals (☎ 693434; 3hr cruise £30; 🕐 departs 9.30am & 2pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep) Runs wildlife-spotting tours to Bressay and Noss; book with the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Up Helly Aa Knees-up on the last Tuesday in January, when a Viking boat is sailed out into the dark then set on fire.

Folk Festival (www.shetlandfolkfestival.com) Worth being here for this, in May.

Johnsmas Foy (www.johnsmasfoy.com) The festival of summer that includes sailing races, the Flavour of Shetland food fair and blues gigs. In June.

Flavour of Shetland (www.flavourofshetland.com) Food fair that's part of Johnsmas Foy festival in June.

Shetland Fiddle Frenzy (www.shetlandfiddlefrenzy.com) Plays up a storm in August.

Fiddle & Accordion Festival Mid-October.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Clickimin Caravan & Camp Site (☎ 741000; Lochside; tent/caravan sites £6.70/10.20; 🕐 May-Sep; Ⓟ 🚐) Attached to the massive leisure centre, this is a real family park with plenty to keep kids busy, from squash to swimming to bowling, even when the weather isn't holding up. Grassy sites for tents are pleasant and caravan sites have purpose-built gravelled areas.

Lerwick Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 692114; www.syha.org.uk; King Harald St; dm £15.50; 🕐 Apr-Sep; ♿) This grand edifice houses one of Scotland's best youth hostels, with a shop, laundry, café and industrial kitchen that even has filter coffee. There's an excellent two-bed dorm, though this is usually reserved for group leaders; book ahead as this places is popular with large groups.

A COTTAGE SOMEWHERE

You didn't come to the Shetlands to stay in generic chain hotels, so why not bunk down in a *böd*, a rustic collection of simple **hostels** (☎ 694688; www.camping-bods.com); which might mean bringing a sleeping bag, stove, and coins to feed the electric meter.

Alternatively, you can self-cater in atmospheric **lighthouse cottages** (☎ 694688; www.lighthouse-holidays.com; r per person £26-43) that mark the dramatic cliffs of Bressay, Sumburgh and Eshaness; these can also be booked at Lerwick's tourist office.

MIDRANGE

Fort Charlotte Guesthouse (☎ 692140; www.fortcharlotte.co.uk; 1 Charlotte St; s £20-25, d from £55) This is another bright spot decked out in pine, with summery colours and thoughtful touches including a shed for bikes and local salmon for breakfast. Views into the town centre are quaint, and you can easily visit the neighbouring fort in this handily located spot.

Alderlodge Guest House (☎ 695705; 6 Clairmont Pl; s £25-35, d £50) Great friendly hosts (who'll let you check out whenever and shrug off a strict breakfast timetable) makes this the top guesthouse. They'll even give you tips on walks and birding spots. Most rooms have small bar fridges and come with en suites, although the cheaper single has a nonattached bathroom that's just as handy.

Glen Orchy House (☎ 692031; www.guesthouselerwick.com; 20 Knab Rd; s/d £47/74; Ⓟ) Sure it's a few extra pennies, but this beautiful guesthouse is worth it for the spectacular conservatory with views of Breiwick Bay alone. Rooms are well presented and there are extra singles so it's a good bet for solo travellers.

Also recommended:

Roseville Guest House (☎ 697128; Roseville.shetlnd@btopenworld.com; 95 King Harald St; s/d £22/40) Good option for early buses; rates are without breakfast, for flexibility.

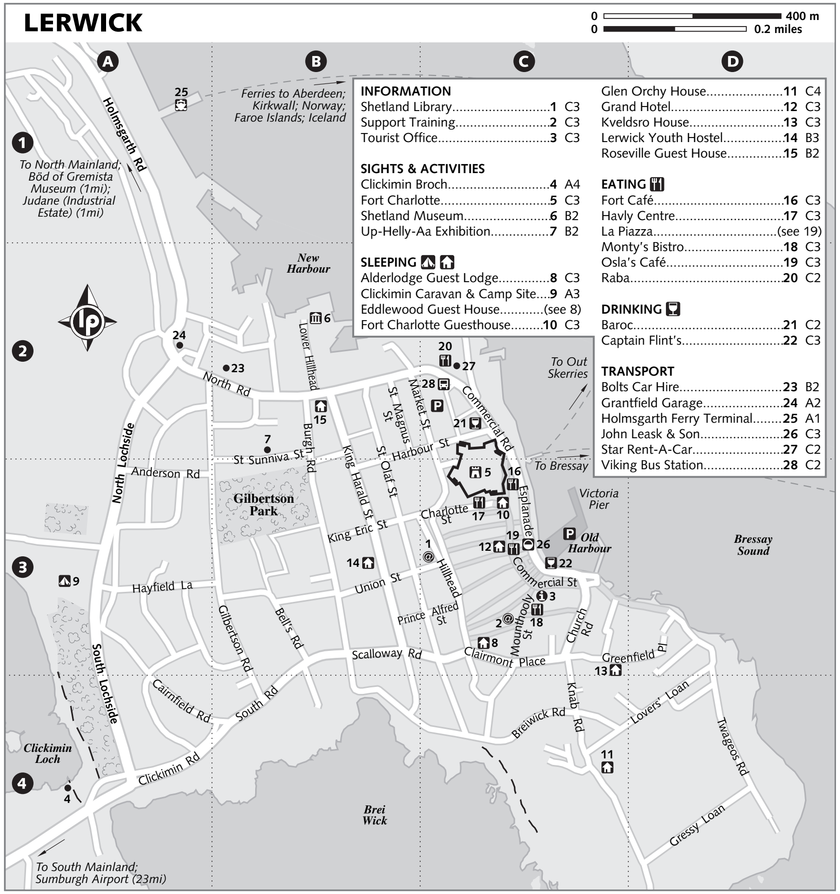
Eddlewood Guest House (☎ 692772; steve.murray13@btinternet.com; 8 Clairmont Pl; s/d £30/50) Superfriendly hosts do anything to help out and rooms are large for the price tag.

TOP END

Grand Hotel (☎ 695788; www.kgqhotels.co.uk; 24 Commercial St; s £72, d £94-125; Ⓟ) The fading dame of Lerwick holds her place near the town centre with declining glory. The mazelike complex includes a restaurant that does a popular Sunday roast (book ahead) and the aptly named nightclub, Posers. Top-storey doubles offer harbour views and while a refurbishment in the 1990s dates some rooms, there are still many period features to charm, such as the snug saloon.

Kveldsro House Hotel (☎ 692195; reception@kveldsrohotel.co.uk; Greenfield Pl; s/d £89/110; 💻) Shetland's sweetest spot does a lot with its harbour views, which can be seen from the pricier double rooms as well as the restaurant. It's got something for everyone, with four-post beds for romantic couples and broadband internet throughout for business travellers, although the additional charge to use LAN is cheeky.

LERWICK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4
Ferries to Aberdeen; Kirkwall; Norway; Faroe Islands; Iceland
To North Mainland; Böd of Gremista Museum (1mi); Judane (Industrial Estate) (1mi)
Holmsgarth Rd
New Harbour
To Out Skerries
To Bressay
North Rd
Lower Hillhead
St Sunniva St
Anderson Rd
North Lochside
Gilbertson Park
Burgh Rd
King Harald St
St Olaf St
St Magnus St
Market St
Harbour St
Commercial Rd
Charlotte St
Esplanade
Victoria Pier
Old Harbour
Bressay Sound
King Eric St
Union St
Hillhead
Commercial St
Hayfield La
Prince Alfred St
Mounthooly St
Church Rd
Gilbertson Rd
Bell's Rd
Scalloway Rd
Clairmont Place
Greenfield Pl
South Lochside
Cairnfield Rd
South Rd
Breiwick Rd
Knab Rd
Lovers' Loan
Twageos Rd
Clickimin Loch
Clickimin Rd
Brei Wick
Gressy Loan
To South Mainland; Sumburgh Airport (23mi)
1
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Eating & Drinking

In recent years the eating options in Lerwick have improved immensely although, like the islands themselves, prices can seem closer to Norway than Scotland.

Fort Café (☎ 693125; 2 Commercial Rd; fish & chips £2.50-3.50) The best located chipper in town has a good sit-in area and serves up the sea after a drenching in the traditional Scottish deep fryer. The thick-cut chips are best enjoyed walking along the pier.

Havly Centre (☎ 692100; 9 Charlotte St; light meals £3-5; 🕐 10am-4pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) With all the wholesomeness of a Danish church, this little eatery is the spot for mug-a-chino mums who let their kids play with the selection of toys while they enjoy carrot cake.

Monty's Bistro (☎ 696555; 5 Mounthooly St; lunch £5-8, dinner £10-16; 🕐 lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat) From the moment you head up the ivy-covered stairway, you can tell you're entering a new world of Shetland grub. Brochelike presentation and innovative vegetarian options single this out as one of the island's best eateries, plus it has a solid wine list and serves Unst brews.

Osla's Café (☎ 696005; 88 Commercial St; meals £5-11; 🕐 noon-8pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus Sun Jun-Aug) This comfy spot flips a good pancake down below but the authentic Italian dishes start upstairs at La Piazza. The upstairs menu features hearty pastas and peppy pizzas that satisfy most appetites.

Raba (☎ 695585; 26 Commercial Rd; mains £6-9, buffet £8.50; 🕑 noon-midnight Sat & Sun) If you're thinking Lerwick is a long way from Lahore, think again. Takeaways and a Sunday all-you-can-eat buffet are the strength of this good local curry house, though eating in is worth it for the tacky collection of Indian ephemera.

Captain Flint's (☎ 692249; 2 Commercial Rd; 🕑 daily) This casual boozer is decked out with mariners knots and other marine knick-knacks, but never feels gimmicky because local pirates still drink here.

Baroc (☎ 690995; cnr Commercial Rd & Harbour St; 🕑 11am-1am) This slick new spot does good coffee during the day and flips on the flat-screen video screen at night to make it the island's lounge bar. Young folk may even try to get you dancing.

Getting There & Away

See p921 for details on Orkney and Aberdeen ferries. From the main airport at Sumburgh, **Leask's** (☎ 693162) runs regular buses to meet flights (£2.40, 50 minutes), although you may wait a while on Sunday, when there are only two services.

AROUND LERWICK

Across the water from Lerwick are the islands of **Bressay** (pronounced Bressah), and beyond it the National Nature Reserve of the **Isle of Noss**.

Despite controversial plans to build a bridge, the only way across to Bressay is by **ferry** (☎ 07626 980317) from Lerwick (adult/car £3/7, frequent). It's a two-hour walk across the picturesque island; some people rent bikes in Lerwick and bring them across. You can pause for an ale or excellent shellfish meal at **Maryfield House Hotel** (☎ 01595-820207; Bressay; mains £7-10), which offers secluded accommodation (singles/doubles from £30/60) near the ferry.

Noss wardens take an inflatable **dinghy** (£3; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun mid-May–Aug) between Bressay and Noss; check with the Lerwick tourist office, as dinghies can't run in bad weather. Once on Noss most visitors head for the **Noup**, a spectacular cliff rising over 180m above sea level that is home to puffins, gannets and guillemots.

Six miles west of Lerwick is Shetland's former capital, **Scalloway** (Scallowah), with the eerie well-preserved ruins of 15th-century **Scalloway Castle** (HS; ☎ 01856-841815; admission free; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) – get the key from the Royal Hotel on Sunday. **Scalloway Museum** (☎ 01595-880675; Main St; admission free; 🕑 Mon-Sat May-Sep) has interesting displays on the 'Shetland Bus', boats that smuggled people and supplies during WWII for the Free Norwegian Forces. If all the action makes you hungry, you should head for **Da Haaf Restaurant** (☎ 01595-880747; Port Arthur; meals £9-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner), part of the North Atlantic Fisheries College, which specialises in local seafood dishes. You can catch nonmilitary buses to/from Lerwick (11 times daily, Monday to Saturday).

SOUTH MAINLAND

Sandwick & Mousa

☎ **01950 / pop 800**

Opposite the scattered village of Sandwick, where you pass the 60-degree latitude line, is the small isle of Mousa, an RSPB reserve that protects 6000 nocturnal storm petrels as well as seals on the rocks. Mousa is also home to the impressive double-walled fortified **Mousa Broch**, Britain's best-preserved broch that was built between 100 BC and AD 100 as a hideout for eloping Vikings. Daily boat trips (£9, 15 minutes, twice daily April to September) allow 2½ hours on the island. You can book trips on the **Solan IV** (☎ 431367; www.mousaboatrips.co.uk; adult/child £10/5), which offers daily tours of Mousa.

There are five to seven buses daily (three on Sunday) between Lerwick and Sandwick.

Sumburgh & Around

☎ **01950**

Old and new collide at the southern tip of Mainland, where an international airport is only a few metres from **Jarlshof** (HS; ☎ 01667-460232; adult £3.30; 🕑 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Apr-Sep), Shetland's most impressive archaeological attraction. This prehistoric Norse settlement was buried in sand and uncovered in a gale. From the ruins you can piece together a history of the Shetlands from Neolithic houses to 16th-century lairds' dwelling to the intact wheelhouse. While you're digging into history check out the remarkable excavation at **Old Scatness** (☎ 01595-694688; Dunrossness; adult/child £2/1; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Sat-Thu Apr-Aug, call for winter hours), which centres on a broch from around 300 BC. Period-costumed guides in the Iron Age reconstructions offer historical anecdotes for kids.

Sumburgh Head boasts large colonies of puffins, kittiwakes, fulmars, guillemots and razorbills, with the chance of spotting dolphins and whales. Scousburgh is 5 miles northwest of Sumburgh, below which is Shetland's best beach, the gloriously white **Scousburgh Sands**.

For a spot handy to the airport (and Jarlshof) you can't beat **Sumburgh Hotel** (☎ 460201; www.sumburgh-hotel.zetnet.co.uk; Sumburgh; s/d from £50/75; Ⓟ 💻), a large pub and hotel that's popular with business folk for meetings, and which offers good bar meals (£8 to £14). Near Scousburgh is the delightful **Spiggie Hotel** (☎ 460409; www.spiggiehotel.co.uk; Scousburgh; s/d £55/80), an old-style country pub which also offers good seafood (meals £6 to £10). You could also stay in the atmospheric Sumburgh Lighthouse cottage (see the boxed text, p936).

To get here from Lerwick take the airport bus (50 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and get off at the second-last stop.

NORTH MAINLAND

Mainland's northwest is known for the red basalt lava cliffs of **Eshaness**, which have been carved out by harsh Atlantic gales to form some of Scotland's best postcard images. When the wind subsides, there's good walking on the peninsula west of Brae and south to the red granite island of **Muckle Roe**, which is connected by a bridge.

The **Tangwick haa Museum** (☎ 01806-503389; admission free; 🕑 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun May-Sep), 1 mile east of Eshaness, captures a sense of the community here, mainly through its wonderful collection of old black-and-white photos.

Buses from Lerwick (three Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) run as far as Hillswick, 7 miles from Eshaness.

Sleeping & Eating

A lot of visitors to this area want to get into the great outdoors, so there are several good camping spots. Perched out on the cliffs is Eshaness Lighthouse cottage, a good option; for information on lighthouse cottages see the boxed text, p936.

Braewick Cafe & Campsite (☎ 01806-503345; Braewick; tent sites £5-10) The brand-spanking new spot overlooks the magnificent St Magnus Bay, with good tent sites and light meals (£5 to £8).

Johnnie Notions Camping Böd (☎ 0870 199 9440; Hamnavoe; dm £6; 🕑 Apr-Sep) Offers very basic dorm accommodation in a small stone cottage with large bunks but no electricity. Book at the Lerwick tourist office or by phone.

Almara (☎ 01806-503261; www.almara.shetland.co.uk; s/d £30/50; Ⓟ) A mile before Hillswick, a puffin signpost leads to this well-equipped guesthouse where the breakfast just keeps coming.

Busta House Hotel (☎ 01806-522506; www.bustahouse.com; Brae; s/d £75/110; Ⓟ) Just before Brae, this is a palatially refurbished hotel that has top rooms, a first-class restaurant menu and a friendly ghost (if you believe local tales).

Booth (☎ 01806-503348; meals by suggested donation of £3-8; 🕑 May-Sep) Serves vegetarian food in one of Shetland's oldest buildings, which was once a Hanseatic trading post. But the best deal is that meals are paid for by donation towards the local wildlife sanctuary.

YELL & UNST

☎ **01957 / pop 720**

The desolate peat moors of Yell are seen by many as a mere stepping stone across to Unst and some visitors call it Yawn. There are, however, several good hill walks and the **Old Haa Museum** (☎ 722339; Burravoe; admission free; 🕑 10am-4pm Tue-Thu & Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep), with exhibits about local flora and fauna. If you're brave, there's also the haunted ruins of **Windhouse** to explore.

Yell has limited accommodation options and, even more worryingly, limited pubs. **Norwind** (☎ 702312; islandoysters@shetland.co.uk; Mid Yell; s/d £33/55) is a pleasant guesthouse near the fire station, with healthy fruit laid on at breakfast.

If you're keen to jump on the Unst ferry, the handy **Gutcher B&B** (☎ 744201; fax 744366; Gutcher; s/d £35/40) offers cheerful accommodation right by the pier. Also near the pier is **Wind Dog Café** (www.winddogcafe.co.uk; 🕑 10am-5pm daily, plus dinner Thu-Sat; 💻), a quirky spot that does great food and coffee to wake you up after exploring this sleepy island.

Unst, the more dynamic island, is Britain's northernmost populated landmass. The rugged isolation is ideal for the windy nature reserve of **Hermaness**, where you can run the gauntlet of dive-bombing bonxies (or great skuas) to sit on the cliffs with almost-tame puffins. From here you can see the rude-sounding **Muckle Flugga**, with its lighthouse built by Robert Louis Stevenson's uncle. Stevenson himself wrote *Treasure Island* while living on Unst and many say he based the treasure maps on this island. For more tips on wildlife-watching duck into the **Hermaness Visitor Centre** (☎ 711278; Shore Station, Burrafirth; admission free; 🕑 9am-5pm early Apr–mid-Sep), near the reserve's entrance. On a clear day from Hermaness you can see **Out Stack**, a collection of rocks that's Scotland's most northerly point.

For manmade attractions, drop anchor at **Unst Boat Haven** (☎ 711528; Haroldswick; adult/child £2/free; 🕘 1.30-5pm May-Sep), which showcases Norse maritime history with several replicas. Just 2 miles north, **Valhalla Brewery** (☎ 711658; www.valhallabrewery.co.uk; tours £3.50; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) fulfils every bloke's dream to start a brewery in their own back shed and brews up the most northerly beer in Britain.

There are plenty of places to sleep in Unst, including **Gardiesfauld Hostel** (☎ 755240; www.gardiesfauld.shetland.co.uk; 2 East Rd, Uyeasound; tents £6, dm £10; 🕘 Apr-Sep; ♿), a snug hostel with a glorious conservatory dining room that overlooks the bay, and tent sites on verdant grass. For a B&B, try **Prestegaard** (☎ 755234; www.prestegaard.shetland.co.uk; Uyeasound; s/d £22/44, with half-board £30), a Victorian house that offers great water views. Closer to Hermaness, **Gerratoun** (☎ 711323; Haroldswick; s/tw £20/40) does good breakfasts and works well with guests requiring special diets.

Yell and Unst are connected with Mainland by small car **ferries** (☎ 722259) operating between Toft and Ulsta (car and driver/passenger £7/3, 20 minutes, frequent) as well as Gutcher and Belmont (car and driver/passenger £3.60/1.70, 10 minutes, frequent).

OTHER ISLANDS

Fetlar has a large RSPB reserve (closed during May to August for the breeding season) and features spectacular arches along the coastline. The island is connected to the islands of Yell and Unst (car and driver/passenger £6.80/3, 25 minutes, six to eight daily) by regular **ferries** (☎ 01957-722259). Alternatively you can take a tour with **Ultima Thule Tours** (☎ 01957-711367; www.seeshetland.shetland.co.uk; 1-day tour £40; 🕘 Thu), which includes northern Yell.

West of Shetland is **Foula**, a windy island supporting a community of 40 people, 1500 sheep and 500,000 sea birds amid dramatic cliff scenery. It's reached by twice-weekly ferries from Walls (single per person/car £2.60/12, two hours), and planes from Tingwall (single £25, 15 minutes, four weekly). You can also charter **Cycharters** (☎ 07887 945480; www.cycharters.co.uk; £50; 🕘 May-Sep), which departs from Scalloway.

Fair Isle sits between the Orkneys and Shetland but, oddly, is Britain's most remote inhabited island. The absence of people makes for bird-watching heaven, especially at **Fair Isle Lodge & Bird Observatory** (☎ 01595-760258; www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk; 🅿) which offers full-board (dorms £30, singles/doubles £44/78) with guided birding strolls and displays of how rangers monitor migratory birds. The island's other big draw is its patterned knitwear, still produced here in the island's cooperative.

From Tingwall, BA/Loganair operates flights to Fair Isle (from £28 single, 25 minutes, twice on Monday, Wednesday, Friday year-round and on Saturday May to September). A day-return trip allows about seven hours on the island. Ferries sail from Grutness (near Sumburgh) with the odd one from Lerwick to Fair Isle (single per person/car £2.60/12, three hours, one on Tuesday and Saturday year-round and Thursday from May to September). Book with **JW Stout** (☎ 01595-760222).

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History

It may be a small island on the edge of Europe, but Britain was never on the sidelines of history. For thousands of years, invaders and incomers have arrived, settled and made their mark here. The result is Britain's fascinating mix of landscape, culture and language – a dynamic pattern that shaped the nation and continues to evolve today.

For many visitors, this rich historic legacy is Britain's main attraction – everything from Stonehenge to Glen Coe, via Hadrian's Wall, Canterbury Cathedral, Caernarfon Castle and the Tower of London – so this History chapter concentrates on the high-profile events and the historic locations you'll see on your travels. Even if you're no fan of dates and dynasties, we hope the overview this chapter provides will help you get the most from your trip.

FIRST ARRIVALS

Stone tools discovered near the town of Lowestoft in Suffolk show that human habitation in Britain stretches back at least 700,000 years, although exact dates depend on your definition of 'human'. As the centuries rolled on, Ice Ages came and went, sea levels rose and fell, and the island now called Britain was frequently joined to the European mainland. Hunter-gatherers crossed the land bridge, moving north as the ice melted and retreating to warmer climes when the glaciers advanced once again.

Walks Through Britain's History (published by AA) guides you to castles, battlefields and hundreds of other sites with a link to the past. Take the air. Breathe in history!

Around 4000 BC a group of migrants arrived from Europe that differed significantly from previous arrivals: instead of hunting and moving on, they settled in one place and started farming – most notably in open chalky hill areas such as the South Downs and Salisbury Plain in southern England.

Alongside their fields these early settlers used rocks and turf to build massive burial mounds, and many of these can still be seen today, including the West Kennet Long Barrow in Wiltshire (p295), the stone frame of the cromlech (burial chamber) of Pentre Ifan in Pembrokeshire (p689), and the great passage grave at Maes Howe, Orkney (p926).

But perhaps the most enduring, and certainly the most impressive, legacy left by these nascent Britons are the great stone circles such as Callanish on Lewis (p915) in Scotland, and – most famous of all – the elaborate and enigmatic sites of Avebury and Stonehenge in southern England, still clearly visible today and described on p293 and p290.

IRON & CELTS

Move on a millennium or two, and it's the Iron Age. The population expanded and began to divide into specific groups or tribes. Across the whole island of Britain the forests were cleared with increasing efficiency as more land was turned to farming. This led to a patchwork pattern of fields, woods and small villages that still exists in many parts of rural lowland Britain. As the population grew, territorial defence became an issue, so the Iron Age people left another legacy – the great 'earthwork' castles of southern England, stone forts in northern England, and *brochs* (defensive towers) in Wales and Scotland.

Built around 3000 BC, Stonehenge is older than the famous Great Pyramids of Egypt.

TIMELINE	4000 BC	500 BC
	Neolithic migrants arrive from Europe. Great stone circles – Callanish and Stonehenge – built	Celts settled in Britain

As landscapes altered, this was also a time of cultural change. The Celts, a people who originally migrated from Central Europe, had settled across much of the island of Britain by around 500 BC, absorbing the indigenous people. A Celtic-British population – sometimes known as the 'ancient Britons' – developed, divided into about 20 different tribes, including the Cantiaci (in today's county of Kent), the Iceni (today's Norfolk), the Brigantes (northwest England), the Picts and Caledonii (Scotland), and the Ordivices (parts of Wales). You noticed the Latin-sounding names? That's because the tribal tags were first handed out by the next arrivals on Britain's shores…

A History of Britain by historian and TV star Simon Schama is a highly accessible three-volume set, putting events from 3000 BC to AD 2000 in a modern context.

ENTER THE ROMANS

Think of the Romans, and you think of legions, centurions and aqueducts. They were all here, as Britain and much of Europe came under the power (or the yoke, for those on the receiving end) of the classical period's greatest military empire.

Julius Caesar, the emperor everyone remembers, made forays to the island of Britain from what is now France in 55 BC. But the real Roman invasion happened a century later when Emperor Claudius led a ruthless campaign that resulted in the Romans controlling pretty much everywhere in southern England by AD 50.

Much of the occupation was straightforward: several Celtic-British tribal kings realised collaboration was more profitable than battle. For example, King Togidbnus of the Regnenses tribe changed his name to Tiberius Cogidumnus and built a Roman-style villa, which can still be seen today at Fishbourne near the town of Chichester (p229); and a historian called Nennius suggests in his *Historia Britonum* (written around AD 800) that the people of Wales revered their Roman rulers so much that one governor, Magnus Maximus, was transformed into a mythical hero called Maxen Wledig.

It wasn't all plain sailing though: some locals fought back. The most famous freedom fighter was warrior-queen Boudicca (also known as Boadicea), who led an army as far as Londinium, the Roman port on the present site of London.

However, opposition was mostly sporadic and no real threat to the legions' military might. By around AD 80 the new province of Britannia (much of today's England and Wales) was firmly under Roman rule. And although it's tempting to imagine noble natives battling courageously against occupying forces, in reality Roman control and stability was probably welcomed by the general population, tired of feuding chiefs and insecure tribal territories.

ENGLAND? BRITAIN? WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The countries of England, Wales and Scotland make up the state of Great Britain. Three countries in one might seem a strange setup, and visitors are sometimes confused about the difference between England and Britain – as are a lot of English people (although the Welsh and Scots are clear on the distinction). But getting a grip on this basic principle will ease your understanding of British history and culture, and make your travel more enjoyable too.

Just for the record, the United Kingdom (UK) consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The island of Ireland consists of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (also called Eire). 'British Isles' is a geographical term for the whole group of islands that make up the UK, the Republic of Ireland and some autonomous or semiautonomous islands such as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Got all that? Good. Now read on…

55 BC
Roman invaders under Julius Caesar make forays into southern England

AD 43
Full Roman invasion of Britain led by Emperor Claudius

LEGACY OF THE LEGIONS

To control the territory they'd occupied, the Romans built castles and garrisons across Britain, especially in Wales and England. Many of these developed into towns, later called 'chesters' and today remembered by names such as Winchester, Manchester, Cirencester and Chester (the remains of Roman amphitheatres can still be seen today at the latter two locations – see p363 and p570 respectively).

The Romans are also well known for the roads they built – initially so the legions could march quickly from place to place, and later so that trade could develop. Wherever possible the roads were built in straight lines (because it was efficient, not, as the old joke goes, to stop the ancient Britons hiding around corners), and included Ermine Street between London and York, Watling Street between London and Chester, and the Fosse Way between Exeter and Lincoln. As you travel around Britain today, you'll notice many ruler-straight Roman roads still followed by modern highways, and in a country better known for old lanes and turnpike routes winding through the landscape, they clearly stand out on the map.

HADRIAN DRAWS A LINE

North of the new province of Britannia was the land the Romans called Caledonia (one day to become Scotland). This proved to be a harder place for them to find a fan club, and in AD 122 Emperor Hadrian decided that rather than conquer the wild Caledonian tribes, he'd settle for keeping them at bay. So a barricade was built across northern England – between today's cities of Carlisle and Newcastle. For nearly 300 years it marked the northernmost limit of the Roman Empire, and today a remarkably well-preserved section of Hadrian's Wall is one of Britain's best-known historic sites (see p632).

For comprehensive chronologies, see the European history section of http://europeanhistory.about.com/or 'monarchs in the British Isles' at http://en.wikipedia.org.

EXIT THE ROMANS

Settlement by the Romans in Britain lasted almost four centuries, and intermarriage was common between locals and incomers (many from other parts of the Empire, including today's Belgium, Spain and Syria – rather than Rome itself) so that a Romano-British population evolved, particularly in the towns, while indigenous Celtic-British culture remained in rural areas.

Along with stability and wealth, the Romans introduced another cultural facet – a new religion called Christianity, after it was recognised by Emperor Constantine in AD 313. But by this time, although Romano-British culture was thriving, back in its Mediterranean heartland the Empire was already in decline.

It was an untidy finale. The Romans were not driven out by the ancient Britons (by this time Romano-British culture was so established there was nowhere for the 'invaders' to go 'home' to). In reality, Britannia was simply dumped by the rulers in Rome, and the colony slowly fizzled out of existence. But historians are neat folk, and the end of Roman power in Britain is generally dated at AD 410.

122
Hadrian's Wall built

410
End of Roman rule in Britain

BRITAIN'S MYTHICAL MONARCH

It was during the Dark Ages that a particularly powerful leader, whose name just may have been Arthur, came to prominence. He may have been a Romano-Briton, he may have been a Celt. He may have come from southern England, or was maybe born in Wales. Or maybe Scotland. He might have fought against the Anglo-Saxons, or against pagan Celts. In truth, virtually nothing is known about this mythical figure from the mists of time, but King Arthur has nevertheless become the focus of many legends. Along with Merlin the magician and the Knights of the Round Table, Arthur inspired a huge body of literature, not least by the Welsh in the epic tale the Mabinogion, and by Thomas Malory in his masterpiece *Morte d'Arthur*. Numerous sites in Britain, from Tintagel in Cornwall to Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, via Snowdonia, Glastonbury and Pembrokeshire, claim Arthurian links that you'll undoubtedly come across as you travel around Britain today. For more tales see the boxed text, p712.

THE EMERGENCE OF ENGLAND

When Roman power faded, the province of Britannia went downhill. Coins were no longer minted, so the use of money dwindled and long-distance trade declined. Some Romano-British towns in England and Wales were abandoned (most of Scotland had escaped Roman control in the first place), and some rural areas became no-go zones as local warlords fought over fiefdoms. Compared with other eras, little is known about the next few centuries, so historians call them the Dark Ages.

Myths and Legends of the British Isles by Richard Barber is ideal if you want a break from historical facts. Gen up on King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, plus much more from the mists of time.

Britain's post-Roman vacuum didn't go unnoticed and once again invaders crossed from the European mainland. Angles and Saxons – Teutonic tribes from the land we now call Germany – advanced across the former Roman turf.

Historians disagree on exactly what happened next. Either the Anglo-Saxons largely overcame, replaced or absorbed the Romano-British and Celts, or the indigenous tribes simply adopted Anglo-Saxon language and culture. Either way, by the late 6th century much of the area we now call England was dominated by the Anglo-Saxons, and divided into three separate kingdoms: Wessex (in today's southern England), Mercia (today's Midlands) and Northumbria (today's northern England).

In a number of areas the original inhabitants lived alongside the Anglo-Saxons, and remained unaffected by the incomers (records show that the Celtic language was still being spoken in parts of southern England when the Normans invaded 500 years later), but the overall impact was immense: today, the core of the English language is Anglo-Saxon, numerous place names have Anglo-Saxon roots, and the very term 'Anglo-Saxon' has become a (much abused and factually incorrect) byword for 'pure English'.

Meanwhile, back in reality, Northumbria was initially the dominant Anglo-Saxon kingdom, covering much of today's northern England and extending its power into Scotland. In the 8th century the kingdom of Mercia became stronger and its ruler, King Offa, marked a clear border between England and Wales – a defensive ditch called Offa's Dyke that can still be seen today. A century later, at the top of the league was the kingdom of Wessex, covering today's southern England, ruled by King Egbert, grandfather of the future King Alfred.

850
Vikings occupy east and northeast England, making Yorvik (today's York) their capital

927
Athelstan, grandson of King Alfred the Great, crowned first King of England

MISSIONARY POSITIONS

On the religious front, the Anglo-Saxons were pagans, and their invasion forced the Christian religion, along with other aspects of Celtic culture, to the western edge of the British Isles – to Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The pope of the time, Gregory, decided that this was a poor show, and in AD 597 he sent missionaries to England to revive interest in the faith. One holy pioneer was St Augustine, who successfully converted Angles in Kent, and some good-looking specimens were sent to Rome as proof – giving rise to Pope Gregory's famous quip about Angles looking like angels.

For full details on Britain's rulers through history, see the regal website www.royal.gov.uk.

Meanwhile in northern England another missionary called St Aidan was even more successful. With admirable energy and fervour, he converted the entire populations of Mercia and Northumbria, and still had time to establish a monastery at Lindisfarne, a beautiful site on a tiny island that can still be visited today (see p639).

THE WAKING OF WALES

Meanwhile, away from the emerging kingdoms of England, the Celts on the outer fringes of the British Isles (particularly in Ireland) had kept alive their own distinct yet Roman-influenced culture, along with the ideals of Christianity. And while the Anglo-Saxons took advantage of the post-Roman void in eastern Britain, towards the end of the 5th century others played the same game on the west side of the island: the Scotti people (from today's Ireland) invaded the land of the Picts (today's Wales and Scotland).

In response to the invasion, people from the kingdom of Gododdin (in today's Scotland) came to northwest Wales. Their initial plan was to drive out the invaders, but they stayed and settled in the area, which became the kingdom of Gwynedd. (The modern county in northern Wales still proudly bears this name.)

The struggle between Welsh settlers and Irish raiders along the coast carried on for the rest of the Dark Ages. At the same time, more settlers came to Wales from today's Cornwall and western France, and Christian missionaries arrived from Ireland in the 6th and 7th centuries.

While these newcomers arrived from the west and south, the people of Wales were also under pressure to the east – harassed by the Anglo-Saxons of England pretty much constantly for hundreds of years. In response, by the 8th century the disparate tribes of Wales had started to band together and sow the seeds of nationhood. They called themselves *cymry* (fellow countrymen), and today *Cymru* is the Welsh word for Wales.

THE STIRRING OF SCOTLAND

While Wales was becoming established in the west of the island of Britain, similar events were taking place to the north, in the land the Romans had called Caledonia. The Picts were the region's dominant tribe, and called their kingdom Alba (see Scotland's Birthplace, p827).

In the power vacuum that followed the fizzle-out of Roman rule in Britannia, Alba was being invaded from two sides: first, towards the end of the 5th century, the Scotti had crossed the sea from today's Ireland and established the kingdom of Dalriada (in today's Argyll). Then in the 7th century Anglo-Saxons from the expanding English kingdom of Northumbria had moved in to colonise southeast Alba. But by this time the Scotti were well

1066
Battle of Hastings: one in the eye for King Harold

1124–53
King David I of Scotland adopts Norman ways, including the feudal system

WHOSE PATRON SAINT IS THIS?

Along the coast of Wales, the struggle between settlers and raiding Irish pirates was a major feature of life during the Dark Ages. Even St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is reputed to have been a Welshman, captured by brigands and taken to Ireland as a slave.

At around the same time, other visitors from Ireland to Wales were Christian missionaries. Among them was a monk named Dewi, who became known as David and later became patron saint of Wales.

So in a fair swap, the patron saint of Wales was an Irishman, while the patron saint of Ireland could well have been Welsh. It seems odd, but then the patron saint of England, St George, was a Turk, and the patron saint of Scotland, St Andrew, was a Palestinian, so maybe in the British Isles it's all par for the course.

dug in alongside the Picts, foreshadowing the time when yet another name – Scotland – would be applied to northern Britain.

THE VIKING ERA

Just as the new territories of England, Wales and Scotland were becoming established, Britain was yet again invaded by a bunch of pesky Continentals. This time, Vikings appeared on the scene.

It's another classic historical image: blonde Scandinavians, horned helmets, big swords, square-sailed longboats, raping and pillaging. School history books give the impression that Vikings turned up, killed everyone, took everything, and left. There's *some* truth in that, but in reality many Vikings settled for good, and their legacy is still evident in parts of northern England – in the form of local dialect, geographical terms such as 'fell' and 'dale' (from the old Norse *fjell* and *dalr*), and even the traces of Nordic DNA in some of today's inhabitants.

The main wave of Vikings came from today's Denmark, and conquered east and northeast England in AD 850. They established their capital at Yorvik (today's city of York, where many Viking remains can still be seen), then spread southwards across central England.

Standing in their way were the Anglo-Saxon armies, led by Alfred the Great – the king of Wessex, and one of English history's best-known characters – and the battles that followed were seminal to the foundation of the nation-state of England.

But the fighting didn't all go Alfred's way. For a few months he was on the run, wading through swamps, hiding in peasant hovels, and famously burning cakes. It was the stuff of legend, which is just what you need when the chips are down. By 886, Alfred had garnered his forces and pushed the Vikings back to the north.

Thus England was divided in two: north and east was Viking 'Danelaw', while south and west was Anglo-Saxon territory. Alfred was hailed as king of the English – the first time the Anglo-Saxons regarded themselves as a truly united people.

Alfred's son and successor was Edward the Elder. After more battles, he gained control of the Danelaw, and thus the whole of England. His son, Athelstan, took the process a stage further and was specifically crowned King of England in 927. But it was hardly cause for celebration: the Vikings were still around, and later in the 10th century more raids from Scandinavia threatened this fledgling English unity. Over the following decades, control swung from Saxon (King Edgar) to Dane (King Knut), and back to Saxon again (King Edward the Confessor). As England came to the end of the first millennium AD, the future was anything but certain.

HIGHS & LOWS IN WALES

Meanwhile, as England fought off the Viking threat, Wales was also dealing with the Nordic intruders. Building on the initial cooperation forced upon them by Anglo-Saxon oppression, in the 9th and 10th centuries the small kingdoms of Wales began cooperating, through necessity, to repel the Vikings.

King Rhodri Mawr (who died in 878) defeated a Viking force off Anglesey and began the unification process. His grandson Hywel the Good is thought to have been responsible for drawing up a set of laws to bind the disparate Welsh tribes. Things were going well, but just as Wales was becoming a recognisable entity, the young country was faced with more destructive onslaughts than it could handle, and in 927 the Welsh kings recognised the Anglo-Saxon King Athelstan as their overlord in exchange for an anti-Viking alliance.

SCOTLAND BECOMES A KINGDOM

While the Welsh were forming their own nation, similar events were being played out in Alba. In the 9th century, the king of the Scotti of Dalriada was one Kenneth MacAilpin (usually anglicised to MacAlpin). His father was a Scotti, but his mother was a Pict princess, so MacAlpin took advantage of the Pictish custom of matrilineal succession to declare himself ruler of both the Scots *and* the Picts, and therefore king of all Alba.

In a surprisingly short time, the Scots gained cultural and political ascendancy. The Picts were absorbed, and Pictish culture simply – and quite suddenly – came to an end. As part of this process, Alba became known as Scotia.

In the 11th century, Scottish nation-building was further consolidated by King Malcolm III (whose most famous act was the 1057 murder of Macbeth – as immortalised by William Shakespeare). With his English queen, Margaret, he founded the Canmore dynasty that would rule Scotland for the next two centuries.

Medieval Women by Henrietta Leyser looks through a female lens at the period from AD 500 to 1500: a life of work, marriage, sex and children (not necessarily in that order).

1066 & ALL THAT

While Wales and Scotland laid the foundations of nationhood, back in England things were unsettled, as the royal pendulum was still swinging between Saxon and Danish-Viking monarchs. When King Edward the Confessor died, the crown passed to Harold, his brother-in-law. That should've settled things, but Edward had a cousin in Normandy (the northern part of today's France) called William, who thought *he* should have succeeded to the throne of England.

The end result was the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the most memorable of dates for anyone who's studied English history – and for anyone who hasn't. William sailed from Normandy with an army of Norman soldiers, the Saxons were defeated, and Harold was killed – according to tradition by an arrow in the eye.

1215
King John forced to sign the Magna Carta

1240
King Llywelyn of Wales (Llywelyn the Great) dies; his grandson (Llywelyn the Last) becomes first Prince of Wales

1290
Robert the Bruce crowned King of Scotland

1296
King Edward I invades Scotland

LOOKING SOUTH

The arrival of William the Conqueror was a seminal event, as it marked the end of Britain's century-old ties to the Nordic countries (only in Orkney and Shetland did the Viking presence continue, until the 15th century). The mainland's perspective turned to France, Western Europe and the Mediterranean, giving rise to massive cultural implications that were to last into our own time. In addition, the Norman landing capped an era of armed invasion. Since 1066, in the near-on thousand years to the present day, Britain has never again been seriously invaded by a foreign power.

NORMAN WISDOM

William became king of England, earning himself the prestigious title William the Conqueror. It was no idle nickname. To control the Anglo-Saxons, the Norman invaders wisely built castles across their new-won territory, and by 1085–86 the Domesday Book provided a census of England's current stock and future potential.

William the Conqueror was followed by William II, but he was mysteriously assassinated during a hunting trip and succeeded by Henry I, another Norman ruler and the first of a long line of kings called Henry.

In the years after the invasion, the French-speaking Normans and the English-speaking Anglo-Saxon inhabitants kept pretty much to themselves. A strict hierarchy of class (the feudal system) developed. At the top was the monarch, below that the nobles (barons, bishops, dukes and earls), then knights and lords, and at the bottom were peasants or 'serfs', effectively slaves.

The feudal system may have established the basis of a class system that still exists to a certain extent in Britain today, but intermarriage was not completely unknown. Henry himself married a Saxon princess. Nonetheless, such unifying moves stood for nothing after Henry's death: a bitter struggle for succession followed, finally won by Henry II who took the throne as the first king of the House – or dynasty – of Plantagenet.

NORMAN IMPACT ON WALES & SCOTLAND

By the time the Normans arrived in England, the Welsh no longer needed anti-Viking protection and had returned to their independent ways. Not if William the Conqueror had anything to do with it. To secure his new kingdom, and keep the Welsh in theirs, William built castles and appointed feudal barons along the border. The Lords Marcher, as they were known, became massively rich and powerful, and the parts of western England along the Welsh border are still called the Marches today.

In Scotland, King Malcolm III and Queen Margaret were more accommodating to Norman ways – or, at least, they liked the way the Normans ran a country. Malcolm's successor, David I (r 1124–53), was impressed too, and adopted the Norman feudal system, as well as granting land to great Norman families. By 1212, a courtier called Walter of Coventry remarked that the Scottish court was 'French in race and manner of life, in speech and in culture'.

But while the French-Norman effect changed England and lowland Scotland over the following centuries, further north the Highland clans remained inaccessible in their glens – a law unto themselves for another 600 years.

1297
Battle of Stirling Bridge; England defeated by a Scots army under the leadership of William Wallace

1314
Battle of Bannockburn; England defeated by Scots under Robert the Bruce

ROYAL & HOLY SQUABBLING

Meanwhile, back in England, the rule of Henry I had come to an end, and the fight to take his place continued the enduring English habit of competition for the throne, and introduced an equally enduring tendency of bickering between royalty and the church. Things came to a head in 1170 when Henry II had 'turbulent priest' Thomas Becket murdered in Canterbury Cathedral. (The stunning cathedral is still an important shrine and a major destination for visitors to Britain today. See p191.)

Perhaps the next king, Richard I, wanted to make amends for his forebears' unholy sentiments by fighting against Muslim 'infidels' in the Holy Land (today's Middle East). Unfortunately he was too busy crusading to bother about governing England – although his bravery earned him the 'Richard Lionheart' sobriquet – and the country fell into disarray.

Richard was succeeded by his brother John, but things got even worse for the general population. According to legend, during this time a nobleman called Robert of Loxley, better known as Robin Hood, hid in Sherwood Forest and engaged in a spot of wealth redistribution. For more on this merry tale see p434.

KING JOHN CALLED TO BOOK

In 1215 the barons found King John's erratic rule increasingly hard to swallow, and forced him to sign a document called Magna Carta (Latin for 'Great Charter'), limiting the monarch's power for the first time in British history. Although originally intended as a set of handy ground rules, Magna Carta was a fledgling bill of human rights which eventually led to the creation of parliament – a body to rule the country, independent of the throne. The signing took place at Runnymede, near Windsor, and you can still visit the site today (see p209).

EXPANSIONIST EDWARD

The next king was Henry III, followed in 1272 by Edward I, a skilled ruler and ambitious general. During a busy 35-year reign, he expounded English nationalism and was unashamedly expansionist in his outlook, leading campaigns into Wales and Scotland.

Some decades earlier, the Welsh king Llywelyn the Great (who died in 1240) had attempted to set up a state in Wales along the lines of the new feudal system in England, and his grandson Llywelyn ('Llywelyn the Last')

DOMINATING THE LANDSCAPE

If you're travelling through Wales, it won't take you long to notice the country's most striking architectural asset: castles. There are around 600 in all, giving Wales the dubious honour of being Europe's most densely fortified country. Most were built in medieval times, first by William the Conqueror, then by other Anglo-Norman kings, to keep a lid on the Welsh. In the late 13th century, Edward I built the spectacular castles at Caernarfon, Harlech, Conwy and Beaumaris – now jointly listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site. Other castles to see include Rhuddlan, Denbigh, Criccieth, Raglan, Pembroke, Kidwelly, Chepstow and Caerphilly. Great for visitors, of course, but a sore point for patriotic Welsh; the writer Thomas Pennant called them 'the magnificent badge of our subjection'.

1337
Start of England's Hundred Years' War with France

1348
Arrival of the Black Death, killing more than a third of England's population

was recognised by Henry III as the first Prince (but not King) of Wales. But Edward I had no time for such niceties, and descended on Wales in a bloody invasion that lasted much of the 1270s. In the end, Wales became a dependent principality, owing allegiance to England. There were no more Welsh kings, and just to make it clear who was boss, Edward made his own son Prince of Wales. Ever since, the British sovereign's eldest son has been automatically given the title. (Most recently, Prince Charles was formally proclaimed Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in 1969, much to the displeasure of Welsh nationalists.)

Edward I then looked north. For the past 200 years, Scotland had been ruled by the Canmores, but the dynasty effectively ended in 1286 with the death of Alexander III. He was succeeded by his four-year-old granddaughter, Margaret ('the Maid of Norway'), who was engaged to the son of Edward I, but she died in 1290 before the wedding could take place.

There followed a dispute for the Scottish throne for which there were 13 *tanists* (contestants), but in the end it came down to two: John Balliol and Robert Bruce of Annandale. Arbitration was needed and Edward I was called in; he chose Balliol. But having finished the job, Edward then sought to formalise his feudal overlordship and travelled through Scotland forcing clan leaders to swear allegiance. In a final blow to Scottish pride, Edward removed the Stone of Scone (also known as the Stone of Destiny or Fatal Stone), on which the kings of Scotland had been crowned for centuries, from an abbey at Scone, and sent it to London (see the boxed text, p757).

That was just too much. In response, Balliol got in touch with Edward's old enemy, France, and arranged a treaty of cooperation – the start of an anti-English partnership (the 'Auld Alliance') that was to last for many centuries (and to the present day when it comes to rugby and football).

Edward wasn't the sort of bloke to brook opposition though. In 1296 the English army defeated Balliol, forcing the Scottish barons to accept Edward's rule, and his ruthless retaliation earned him the title 'Hammer of the Scots'. But still the Scottish people refused to lie down: in 1297, at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the English were defeated by a Scots army under the leadership of William Wallace. More than 700 years later, Wallace is still remembered as the epitome of Scottish patriots (see p840).

PLANTAGENET GLOOM

The story of William Wallace is told in the Mel Gibson epic *Braveheart*. In devolution debates of the 1990s, the patriotic pride engendered by this movie did more for Scottish nationalism than any politician's speech.

Back in England, Edward I was succeeded by Edward II, but the new model lacked the military success of his forebear, and his favouring of personal friends over barons didn't help. Edward failed in the marriage department too, and his rule came to a grisly end when his wife, Isabella, and her lover, Roger Mortimer, had him murdered in Berkeley Castle.

By this time, Robert the Bruce (grandson of Robert Bruce of Annandale) had crowned himself King of Scotland (1290), been beaten in battle, gone on the run, and while hiding in a cave been famously inspired to renew his efforts by a spider persistently spinning its web. Bruce's army went on to defeat Edward II and the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, another milestone in Scotland's long fight to remain independent.

Next in line was Edward III. Highlights of his reign – actually lowlights – include the start of the Hundred Years' War with France in 1337 and the arrival of a plague called the Black Death about a decade later, which eventually carried off 1.5 million people, more than a third of the country's population.

Another change of king didn't improve things either. Richard II had barely taken the throne when the Peasants' Revolt erupted in 1381. This attempt by commoners to overthrow the feudal system was brutally suppressed, further injuring an already deeply divided country.

1381	1400
Richard II confronted by Peasants' Revolt	Owain Glyndŵr leads Welsh rebels against English army

STEWARTS ENTER THE SCENE

While the Hundred Years' War raged (or rather, rumbled) between England and France, things weren't much better in Scotland. After the death of Robert the Bruce in 1329, the country was ravaged by endless internal conflicts and plague epidemics.

Bruce's son became David II of Scotland, but he was soon caught up in battles against fellow Scots disaffected by his father and aided by England's Edward III. So when David died in 1371, the Scots quickly crowned Robert Stewart (Robert the Bruce's grandson) as king, marking the start of the House of Stewart, which was to crop up again in England a bit later down the line.

HOUSES OF YORK & LANCASTER

The ineffectual Richard II was ousted in 1399 by a powerful baron called Henry Bolingbroke, who became Henry IV, the first monarch of the House of Lancaster. Less than a year later, his rule was disrupted by a final cry of resistance from the downtrodden Welsh, led by royal-descendant Owain Glyndŵr (Owen Glendower to the English). It wasn't a good result for Wales. The rebellion was crushed, vast areas of farmland were destroyed, Glyndŵr died an outlaw, and the Welsh elite were barred from public life for many years.

Shakespeare's *Henry V* was filmed most recently in 1989 – a superb modern epic, starring English cinema darling Kenneth Branagh as the eponymous king. An earlier film of the same name, staring Laurence Olivier and filmed in 1944 as a patriotic rallying cry, is also worth catching.

Henry IV was followed, neatly, by Henry V, who decided it was time to stir up the dormant Hundred Years' War. He defeated France at the Battle of Agincourt and the patriotic tear-jerker speech he was given by Shakespeare ('cry God for Harry, England and St George') has ensured his pole position among the most famous English kings of all time.

Still keeping things neat, Henry V was followed by Henry VI. His main claim to fame was overseeing the building of great places of worship (King's College Chapel in Cambridge, Eton Chapel near Windsor – both architectural wonders can still be admired today, see p462 and p207 respectively), interspersed with great bouts of insanity.

When the Hundred Years' War finally ground to a halt in 1453, you'd have thought things would be calm for a while. But no. The English forces returning from France threw their energies into another battle, a civil war dubbed the Wars of the Roses.

Briefly it went like this: Henry VI of the House of Lancaster (whose emblem was a red rose) was challenged by Richard, Duke of York (emblem, a white rose). Henry was weak and it was almost a walkover for Richard. But Henry's wife, Margaret of Anjou, was made of sterner mettle and her forces defeated the challenger. It didn't rest there: Richard's son Edward entered the scene with an army, turned the tables and finally drove out Henry. He became King Edward IV, the first monarch of the House of York.

1459–71	1509
Wars of the Roses	Henry VIII comes to throne: goes on to marry six times, establish Church of England, dissolve monasteries

RULING BRITANNIA

A glance at the story of England's ruling dynasties clearly shows that life was never dull for the folk at the top. Despite immense power and privilege, the position of monarch (or, perhaps worse, *potential* monarch) probably ranks as one of history's least safe occupations. English kings have been killed in battle (Harold), beheaded (Charles I), assassinated (William II), murdered by a wicked uncle (Edward V), and knocked off by their queen and her lover (Edward II). Similarly, life was just as uncertain for the rulers of Wales and Scotland; threats came from rival warlords or ambitious clan chiefs – you only have to think of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – and often from the English king next door. As you visit the castles and battlefields of Britain, you may feel a touch of sympathy – but only a touch – for those all-powerful figures continually looking over their shoulder.

DARK DEEDS IN THE TOWER

Life was never easy for the guy at the top. Edward IV hardly had time to catch his breath before facing a challenger to his own throne. Enter scheming Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who liked to be billed as 'the kingmaker'. In 1470 he teamed up with the energetic Margaret of Anjou to shuttle Edward into exile and bring Henry VI back to the throne. But a year later Edward IV came bouncing back, and this time there was no messing about; he killed Warwick, captured Margaret, and had Henry snuffed out in the Tower of London.

Although Edward IV's position seemed secure, he ruled for only a decade before being succeeded by his 12-year-old son, now Edward V. But the boy king's reign was even shorter than his dad's. In 1483 he was mysteriously murdered, along with his brother, and once again the Tower of London was the scene of the crime.

With the 'little princes' dispatched, this left the throne open for their dear old Uncle Richard. Whether he was the princes' killer is still the subject of debate, but his rule as Richard III was short-lived. Despite another famous Shakespearean sound bite ('A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse'), few tears were shed in 1485 when he was tumbled from the top job by Henry Tudor.

What the Tudors & Stuarts Did For Us by TV presenter and historian Adam Hart-Davis covers great achievements and innovations in this key period of history.

MOVES TOWARDS UNITY

There hadn't been a Henry on the throne for a while, and this new incumbent, Henry VII, harked back to the days of his namesakes with a skilful reign. After the York-vs-Lancaster Wars of the Roses, his Tudor family name was important. He also diligently mended fences with his northern neighbours by marrying off his daughter to James IV of Scotland, thereby linking the Tudor and Stewart lines.

On top of his family links with Scotland, Henry VII was also half Welsh. He withdrew many of the anti-Welsh restrictions imposed after the Glyndŵr uprising, and his countrymen were only too grateful to enjoy new-found preferential treatment at the English court and career opportunities in English public life.

Matrimony may have been more useful than warfare for Henry VII, but the multiple marriages of his successor, Henry VIII, were a very different story. Fathering a male heir was his problem – hence the famous six wives – but the pope's disapproval of divorce and remarriage led to a split with the Roman Catholic Church. Parliament made Henry the head of the Protestant Church of England – this was the beginning of a pivotal division between Catholics and Protestants that still exists in some areas of Britain.

In 1536 Henry followed this up by 'dissolving' many monasteries in Britain and Ireland, a blatant takeover of their land and wealth rather than a symptom of the struggle between church and state. Nonetheless, the general populace felt little sympathy for the wealthy and often corrupt abbeys, and in 1539–40 another monastic land grab swallowed the larger ones as well. At the same time, Henry signed the Acts of Union (1536–43), formally uniting England and Wales for the first time. This was welcomed by the aspiring Welsh gentry, as it meant English law and parliamentary representation for Wales, plus plenty of trade opportunities. The Welsh language, however, ceased to be recognised in the law courts.

In Scotland, James IV had been succeeded by James V, who died in 1542, brokenhearted, it is said, after yet another defeat at the hands of the English. His baby daughter Mary became queen and Scotland was ruled by regents. From his throne in England Henry VIII sent a proposal that Mary should marry his son. But the regents rejected his offer and – not forgetting the Auld Alliance – Mary was sent to France instead. Henry was furious and sent his armies to ravage southern Scotland and sack Edinburgh in an (unsuccessful) attempt to force agreement to the wedding – the Rough Wooing, as it was called with typical Scottish irony and understatement.

Six Wives: the Queens of Henry VIII by David Starky is an accessible modern study of the multi-marrying monarch.

THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

Henry VIII died in 1547, and was succeeded by his son Edward VI, then by daughter Mary I, but their reigns were short. So, unexpectedly, the third child, Elizabeth, came to the throne.

As Elizabeth I, she inherited a nasty mess of religious strife and divided loyalties, but after an uncertain start she gained confidence and turned the country around. Refusing marriage, she borrowed biblical imagery and became known as the Virgin Queen – perhaps the first British monarch to create a cult image. It paid off. Her 45-year reign was a period of boundless optimism characterised by the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the expansion of trade, the writing of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, and the global explorations of English seafarers Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake.

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

Meanwhile, Elizabeth's cousin Mary (daughter of Scottish King James V, and a Catholic) had become known as Mary Queen of Scots. She'd spent her childhood in France and had married the French dauphin (crown prince), thereby becoming queen of France as well. Why stop at two? After her husband's death, Mary returned to Scotland, from where she ambitiously claimed the English throne as well – on the grounds that Elizabeth I was illegitimate. But Mary's plans failed; she was imprisoned and forced to abdicate in favour of her son (a Protestant, who became James VI of Scotland).

Mary escaped to England and appealed to Elizabeth for help. This could have been a rookie error, or she might have been advised by courtiers with their own agenda. Either way, it was a bad move. Mary was seen – not surprisingly – as a security risk and was imprisoned once again. In an uncharacteristic display of indecision, before finally ordering her execution Elizabeth held Mary under arrest for 19 years, moving her frequently from

Elizabeth (1998), directed by Shekhar Kapur and staring Cate Blanchett, covers the early years of the Virgin Queen's rule – as she graduates from novice princess to commanding queen – a time of forbidden love, unwanted suitors, intrigue and death.

1536–43
Acts of Union, formally uniting England and Wales

1558
Elizabeth I comes to throne: enter stage right William Shakespeare, exit due west Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake

1642–49
English Civil War between the king's Cavaliers and Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads

1665–66
'The Great Plague' kills 100,000 people, including 20% of London's population.

house to house, so that today England has many stately homes (and even a few pubs) claiming 'Mary Queen of Scots slept here'.

UNITED & DISUNITED BRITAIN

Elizabeth died in 1603; but despite a bountiful reign, the one thing the Virgin Queen had failed to provide was an heir. She was succeeded by her closest relative, James, the safely Protestant son of the murdered Mary. He became James I of England and VI of Scotland, the first English monarch of the House of Stuart (Mary's time in France had Gallicised the Stewart name). Most importantly, James united England, Wales and Scotland into one kingdom for the first time in history – another step towards British unity, at least on paper – although the terms 'Britain' and 'British' were still not yet widely used in this context.

James' attempts to smooth religious relations were set back by the anti-Catholic outcry that followed the infamous Guy Fawkes Gunpowder Plot, a terrorist attempt to blow up Parliament in 1605. The event is still celebrated every 5 November, with fireworks, bonfires and burning effigies of Guy himself.

Alongside the Catholic–Protestant rift, the divide between king and parliament continued to smoulder. The power struggle worsened during the reign of the next king, Charles I, and eventually degenerated into the Civil War of 1642–49. The antiroyalist forces led by Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan who preached against the excesses of the monarch and established church, and his army of parliamentarians (or Roundheads) were pitched against the king's forces (Cavaliers) in a conflict that tore England apart – although fortunately for the last time in history. It ended with victory for the Roundheads, the king executed, and England declared a republic – with Cromwell hailed as 'Protector'.

The Civil War had been a bitter conflict, but it failed to exhaust Cromwell's appetite for mayhem; a devastating rampage to gain control of Ireland – the first British colony – followed quickly in its wake. Meanwhile, the Scots suffered their own parallel civil war between the royalists and radical 'Covenanters' who sought freedom from state interference in church government.

THE RETURN OF THE KING

By 1653 Cromwell was finding parliament too restricting and he assumed dictatorial powers, much to his supporters' dismay. On his death in 1658, he was followed half-heartedly by his son, but in 1660 parliament decided to re-establish the monarchy – as republican alternatives were proving far worse.

Charles I wore two shirts on the day of his execution, reputedly to avoid shivering and being thought a coward.

Charles II (the exiled son of Charles I) came to the throne, and his rule – known as 'the Restoration' – saw scientific and cultural activity bursting forth after the strait-laced ethics of Cromwell's time. Exploration and expansion were also on the agenda. Backed by the army and navy (modernised, ironically, by Cromwell), English colonies stretched down the American coast, while the East India Company set up headquarters in Bombay (now Mumbai), laying foundations for what was to become the British Empire.

The next king, James II, had a harder time. Attempts to ease restrictive laws on Catholics ended with his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne by William III, the Protestant king of Holland, better known as William of Orange. Ironically, William was married to James' own daughter Mary, but it didn't stop him doing the dirty on his father-in-law.

William and Mary both had equal rights to the throne and their joint accession in 1688 was known as the Glorious Revolution. Lucky they were married or there might have been *another* civil war.

1692
Glen Coe Massacre; Campbell clan members kill MacDonald clan members for not swearing allegiance to King William

1707
Act of Union passed, linking England, Wales and Scotland under one parliament for the first time in history

KILLIECRANKIE & GLEN COE

In Scotland, things weren't quite so glorious. Anti-English (essentially anti-William and anti-Protestant) feelings ran high, as did pro-James ('Jacobite') support. In 1689 Jacobite leader Graham of Claverhouse, better known as 'Bonnie Dundee', raised a Highlander army and routed English troops at Killiecrankie.

Then in 1692 came the infamous Glen Coe Massacre. On English government orders members of the Campbell clan killed most of the MacDonald clan for failing to swear allegiance to William (see p888).

The atrocity further fuelled Catholic–Protestant divisions, and further tightened English domination of the island of Britain, although Jacobite sentiment surfaced in two rebellions (see p52) before finally succumbing to history.

FULL FINAL UNITY

In 1694 Mary died, leaving just William as monarch. He died a few years later and was followed by his sister-in-law Anne (the second daughter of James II). In 1707, during Anne's reign, the Act of Union was passed, bringing an end to the independent Scottish Parliament, and finally linking the countries of England, Wales and Scotland under one parliament (based in London) for the first time in history. The nation of Britain was now established as a single state, with a bigger, better and more powerful parliament, and a constitutional monarchy with clear limits on the power of the king or queen.

A Brief History of British Kings & Queens by Mike Ashley provides a concise and comprehensive overview, with timelines, biographies and family trees. Good for pub-quiz training too.

The new-look Parliament didn't wait long to flex its muscles. On the side, the Act of Union banned any Catholic, or anyone married to a Catholic, from ascending the throne, a rule still in force today. And although the Glorious Revolution was relatively painless in Britain, the impact on Ireland (where the Protestant ascendancy dates from William's victory) sowed the seeds for division that continued into our own time.

In 1714 Anne died without leaving an heir, marking the end of the Stuart line. The throne was then passed to distant (but still safely Protestant) German relatives, the House of Hanover.

By the mid-18th century, struggles for the British throne seemed a thing of the past, and the Hanoverian kings increasingly relied on Parliament to govern the country. As part of the process, from 1721 to 1742 a senior parliamentarian called Sir Robert Walpole effectively became Britain's first prime minister.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES OUT

Stronger control over the British Isles was mirrored by even greater expansion abroad. The British Empire – which, despite its official title, was predominantly an *English* entity – continued to grow in America, Canada and India. The first claims were made to Australia after Captain James Cook's epic voyage in 1768.

1721–42
Robert Walpole is Britain's first prime minister

1746
Battle of Culloden; the end of the Jacobite Rebellions

THE JACOBITE REBELLIONS

Despite, or perhaps because of, the 1707 Act of Union, anti-English feeling in Scotland refused to disappear. The Jacobite rebellions, most notably those of 1715 and 1745, were attempts to overthrow the Hanoverian monarchy and bring back the Stuarts. Although these are iconic events in Scottish history, in reality there was never much support for the Jacobite cause outside the Highlands: the people of the Lowlands were mainly Protestant and feared a return to Catholicism, which the Stuarts represented.

The 1715 rebellion was led by James Edward Stuart (the Old Pretender), the son of the exiled James II of England and VII of Scotland. When the attempt failed, he fled to France, and to impose control on the Highlands the English military (under the notorious General Wade) constructed roads into previously inaccessible glens.

In 1745 James' son Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender) landed in Scotland to claim the crown for his father. He was successful initially, moving south into England as far as Derby, but the prince and his Highland supporters suffered a catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. For more details see p894. His legendary escape to the Western Isles is eternally remembered in the *Skye Boat Song*. And in a different way, General Wade is remembered too – many of the roads his troops built are still in use today.

The Empire's first major reverse came when the American colonies won the War of Independence (1776–83). This setback forced Britain to withdraw from the world stage for a while, a gap not missed by French ruler Napoleon. He threatened to invade Britain and hinder the power of the British overseas, before his ambitions were curtailed by navy hero Viscount Horatio Nelson and military hero the Duke of Wellington at the famous battles of Trafalgar (1805) and Waterloo (1815).

THE INDUSTRIAL AGE

While the Empire expanded abroad, at home Britain had become the crucible of the Industrial Revolution. Steam power (patented by James Watt in 1781) and steam trains (launched by George Stephenson in 1825) transformed methods of production and transport, and the towns of the English Midlands became the first industrial cities.

Cook's voyage to the southern hemisphere was primarily a scientific expedition. His objectives included monitoring the transit of Venus, an astronomical event that happens only twice every 180 years or so (most recently in 2004). 'Discovering' Australia was just a sideline.

This population shift in England was mirrored in Scotland. From about 1750 onwards, much of the Highlands region had been emptied of people, as landowners casually expelled entire farms and villages to make way for more profitable sheep farming, a seminal event in Scotland's history known as the Clearances (see p897). Industrialisation just about finished off the job. Although many of the dispossessed left for the New World, others came from the glens to the burgeoning factories of the Lowlands. The tobacco trade with America boomed, and then gave way to textile and engineering industries, as the cotton mills of Lanarkshire and the Clyde shipyards around Glasgow expanded rapidly.

The same happened in Wales. By the early 19th century copper, iron and slate were being extracted in the Merthyr Tydfil and Monmouth areas. The 1860s saw the Rhondda valleys opened up for coal mining, and Wales soon became a major exporter of coal, as well as the world's leading producer of tin plate.

Across Britain, industrialisation meant people were on the move as never before. People left the land and villages their families had occupied for generations. Often they went to the nearest factory, but not always. People from rural Dorset migrated to the Midlands, for example, while farmers from Scotland and England settled in South Wales and became miners. The rapid change from rural to urban society caused great dislocation, and although knowledge of science and medicine also improved alongside industrial advances, for many people poverty and deprivation were the adverse side effects of Britain's economic blossoming.

Nevertheless, by the time Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837, Britain's factories dominated world trade and Britain's fleets dominated the oceans. The rest of the 19th century was seen as Britain's Golden Age (for some people today, it still is), a period of confidence not enjoyed since the days of the last great queen, Elizabeth I.

Victoria ruled a proud nation at home, and great swaths of territories abroad, from Canada through much of Africa and India to Australia and New Zealand – trumpeted as 'the Empire where the sun never sets'. In a final move of PR genius, the queen's chief spin doctor and most effective prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, had Victoria crowned Empress of India. She'd never even been to India, but the British people simply loved the idea.

The times were optimistic, but it wasn't all tub-thumping jingoism. Disraeli and his successor William Gladstone also introduced social reforms to address the worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Education became universal, trade unions were legalised and the right to vote was extended to commoners. Well, to male commoners. Women didn't get the vote for another few decades. Disraeli and Gladstone may have been enlightened gentlemen, but there *were* limits.

At its height the British Empire covered 20% of the land area of the Earth and contained a quarter of the world's population.

WORLD WAR I

Queen Victoria died in 1901 and ever-expanding Britain died with her. The new king, Edward VII, ushered in the relaxed new Edwardian era – and a long period of decline.

In Continental Europe, four restless military powers (Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Germany) focused their sabre-rattling on the Balkan states, and the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914 finally sparked a clash which became the Great War we now call WWI. When German forces entered Belgium, on their way to invade France, soldiers from Britain and Allied countries were drawn into the war – a vicious conflict of stalemate and horrendous slaughter – most infamously on the killing fields of Flanders and the beaches of Gallipoli.

By the war's weary end in 1918 more than a million Britons had died (not to mention millions more from many other countries) and there was hardly a street or village untouched by death, as the sobering lists of names on war memorials all over Britain still show. The conflict added 'trench warfare' to the dictionary, and further deepened the huge gulf that had existed between ruling and working classes since the days of the Norman feudal system.

DISILLUSION & DEPRESSION

For the soldiers who did return from WWI, disillusion led to questioning of the social order. A new political force – the Labour Party, to represent the working class – upset the balance that had been enjoyed by the Liberal and Conservative parties since the days of Walpole. The first Labour leader was

1750
Start of Britain's Industrial Age

1799–1805
Napoleonic Wars; key battles at Trafalgar (1805) and Waterloo (1815)

1837
Queen Victoria comes to the throne; rest of 19th century seen as Britain's 'Golden Age'

1914–18
WWI; Britain at war with Germany

Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks is a novel partly set in the trenches of WWI. Understated and severely moving, it tells of love, passion, fear, waste, incompetent generals and the poor bloody infantry.

Keir Hardie, a Scottish politician representing a Welsh constituency (the coal-mining town of Merthyr Tydfil) in the London-based Parliament.

The Labour Party won for the first time in the 1923 election, in coalition with the Liberals; James Ramsay MacDonald was the first Labour prime minister. A year later the Conservatives regained power, but the rankling 'them-and-us' mistrust, fertilised by soaring unemployment, led to the 1926 General Strike. When half a million workers marched through the streets, the government sent in the army, setting the stage for industrial unrest that was to plague Britain for the next 50 years.

Unrest at home was mirrored by unrest abroad – in Ireland, Britain's oldest colony. WWI was no sooner over than Britain was involved in the bitter Anglo-Irish War, which ended in mid-1921 with most of Ireland achieving full independence (although six counties in the north remained British). The new political entity may have been billed as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but the decision to divide the island of Ireland in two was to have long-term repercussions that still dominate political agendas in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland today.

The unrest of the 1920s worsened in the '30s as the world economy slumped and the Great Depression took hold – a decade of misery and political upheaval. Even the royal family took a knock when Edward VIII abdicated in 1936 so he could marry a woman who was twice divorced and, horror of horrors, American. The ensuing scandal was good for newspaper sales and hinted at the prolonged 'trial by media' suffered by royals in more recent times.

The throne was taken by Edward's less-than-charismatic brother George VI and Britain dithered through the rest of the decade, with mediocre and visionless government failing to confront the country's problems.

WORLD WAR II

Meanwhile, on mainland Europe Germany saw the rise of Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party. Many feared another Great War, but Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met Hitler in 1938 and promised Britain 'peace in our time'. He was wrong. The following year Hitler invaded Poland. Two days later Britain was once again at war with Germany.

The German army moved with astonishing speed, swept west through France, and pushed back British forces to the beaches of Dunkirk in northern France in June 1940. An extraordinary flotilla of rescue vessels turned total disaster into a brave defeat – and the events of Dunkirk are still remembered with pride and sadness in Britain every year.

By mid-1940, most of Europe was controlled by Germany. In Russia, Stalin had negotiated a peace agreement. The USA was neutral, leaving Britain virtually isolated. Neville Chamberlain, reviled for his earlier 'appeasement', stood aside to let a new prime minister – Winston Churchill – lead a coalition government. (See the boxed text, opposite, for more Churchillian details.)

In 1941 the tide began to turn as the USA entered the war to support Britain, and Germany became bogged down on the eastern front fighting Russia. The following year, British forces were revitalised thanks to Churchill's focus on arms manufacturing, and the Germans were defeated in North Africa.

By 1944 Germany was in retreat. Britain and the USA controlled the skies, Russia's Red Army pushed back from the east, and the Allies were again on the beaches of France as the Normandy landings (D-Day, as it's better remembered) marked the start of the liberation of Europe from the west, and in Churchill's words, 'the beginning of the end of the war'. By 1945 Hitler was dead, and his country ruined. Two atomic bombs forced the surrender of Germany's ally Japan, and finally brought WWII to a dramatic and terrible close.

1916
Welsh politician David Lloyd George becomes prime minister of Britain

1926
General Strike

The Normandy landings was the largest military armada in history; more than 5000 ships were involved, with hundreds of thousands of troops landed in the space of about four days.

SWINGING & SLIDING

In Britain, despite the victory, there was an unexpected swing on the political front. An electorate tired of war and hungry for change tumbled Churchill's Conservatives and voted in the Labour Party, led by Clement Attlee. This was the dawn of the 'welfare state'; key industries (such as steel, coal and railways) were nationalised, and the National Health Service was founded. But rebuilding Britain was a slow process, and the postwar 'baby boomers' experienced food rationing well into the 1950s.

The effects of depleted reserves were felt overseas too, as one by one the colonies became independent, including India and Pakistan in 1947, Malaya

BRITISH HEROES – CHURCHILL

Ask any British person to name a 'great hero of British history' and Winston Churchill will be high on the list, along with King Arthur, Owain Glyndŵr, William Wallace, Admiral Nelson and the Duke of Wellington – and quite possibly Margaret Thatcher and David Beckham. More than 60 years after the end of WWII, Churchill's legacy is undeniable.

Although Churchill was from an aristocratic family, his early years were not auspicious; he was famously a 'dunce' at school, an image he actively cultivated in later life. As a young man he joined the British Army, serving mainly in India, Sudan and South Africa, also acting as a war correspondent for various newspapers, and writing several books about his exploits.

In 1901 Churchill was elected to Parliament as a Conservative MP, but in 1904 he defected to the Liberals, then the main opposition party. A year later, after a Liberal election victory, he became a government minister, then worked his way up through the ranks, including Minister of Munitions in WWI, before rejoining the Conservatives in 1922. Through the rest of the 1920s, Churchill held various ministerial positions. High points of this period included alleged plans in 1926 to combat striking coal miners with machine gun–wielding troops, and calling Mussolini a 'genius', a sobriquet trumped in 1929 by his reference to Ghandi as 'a half-naked fakir'.

The 1930s were quiet on the political front for Churchill – apart from his criticism of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's 'appeasement' of Hitler and his call for British rearmament to face a growing German threat – so he concentrated on writing. His multivolume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* was drafted during this period; although biased and flawed by modern standards, it remains his best-known work.

In 1939 Britain entered WWII and by 1940 Churchill was prime minister, taking additional responsibility as Minister of Defence. Hitler had expected an easy victory, but Churchill's extraordinary dedication (not to mention his radio speeches – most famously offering 'nothing but blood, toil, sweat and tears' and promising to 'fight on the beaches') inspired the British people to resist. Between July and October 1940 the Royal Air Force withstood Germany's aerial raids to win what became known as the Battle of Britain – a major turning point in the war, and a chance for land forces to rebuild their strength. It was an audacious strategy, but it paid off and Churchill was lauded as a national hero, praise that continued to the end of the war and until his death in 1965, and an honour he still holds today.

1939–45
WWII; Britain at war with Germany. Again.

1952
Queen Elizabeth II ascends the British throne

Windrush – The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain by Mike and Trevor Phillips traces the history of Britain's West Indian immigrants – from 1949's first arrivals (on the ship *Empire Windrush*) to their descendants living in our own time.

in 1957 and Kenya in 1963. People from these ex-colonies – and especially from the Caribbean – were drawn to the mother country through the 1960s. In many cases they were specifically invited, as additional labour was needed to help rebuild postwar Britain. In the 1970s many immigrants of Asian origin arrived, after being forced out of Uganda by dictator Idi Amin.

In the Empire the sun was setting, but Britain's royal family was still going strong. In 1952 George VI was succeeded by his daughter Elizabeth II, and following the trend set by earlier queens Elizabeth I and Victoria, she has remained on the throne for more than five decades, overseeing a period of massive social and economic change.

By the late 1950s, recovery was strong enough for Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to famously remind the British people they'd 'never had it so good'. Some saw this as a boast for a confident future, others as a warning about difficult times ahead, but most probably forgot all about it because by this time the 1960s had started and grey old Britain was suddenly more fun and lively than it had been for generations – especially if you were aged over 10 and under 30. There was the music of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Cliff Richard and the Shadows, while cinema audiences flocked to see Michael Caine, Peter Sellers and Glenda Jackson.

Alongside the glamour, 1960s business seemed swinging too. But the 1970s brought inflation, the oil crisis and international competition, a deadly combination that revealed the weakness of Britain's economy, and a lot that was rotten in British society too. The ongoing struggle between disgruntled working classes and inept ruling classes was brought to the boil once again; the rest of the decade was marked by strikes, disputes and general all-round gloom – especially when the electricity was cut, as power stations went short of fuel or labour.

Even when 'local' reserves of oil and gas were discovered in the North Sea, off Britain's northeast coast, things improved only slightly. Prosperity came to the Aberdeen area and the Shetland Islands in Scotland, but most of the revenue was pipelined back to England. This, along with takeovers of many Scottish companies by English ones, fuelled increasing nationalist sentiment in Scotland.

Neither the Conservatives under Edward Heath, nor Labour under Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, proved capable of controlling the strife. The British public had had enough, and the elections of 1979 returned the Conservatives led by a little-known politician named Margaret Thatcher.

THE THATCHER YEARS

Soon everyone had heard of Mrs Thatcher. Love her or hate her, no-one could argue that her methods weren't dramatic. British workers were Luddites? She fired them. Trade unions archaic? She smashed them. British industry inefficient? She shut it down. Nationalised companies a mistake? She sold them off – with a sense of purpose that made Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries seem like a Sunday-school picnic.

And just in case there was any doubt about Mrs Thatcher's patriotism, in 1982 she led Britain into war against Argentina in a dispute over the Falkland Islands, leading to a bout of public flag-waving which hadn't been seen since WWII.

1963	1979
The swinging '60s arrive. The Beatles become household names. Outbreak of incurable Beatlemania.	Mrs Thatcher elected as Britain's first female prime minister

Against this background, Mrs Thatcher also waged a relentless assault on the power of trade unions, fronted by the closure of 'uneconomic' coal mines throughout Britain – most notably in the English Midlands, Yorkshire, south Wales and parts of Scotland. In response, the nationwide strike by miners in the early 1980s was one of the most bitter labour disputes in British history, but Mrs Thatcher was victorious: since 1984 around 140 coal pits have closed, meaning a quarter of a million jobs lost, and communities destroyed across the country.

The social costs of Thatcherism were enormous and questionable, but, in line with a global upswing, by the late 1990s the British economy was in better shape than it had been for years. In two decades the economic base has shifted away from heavy industry, and today the majority of Britons are employed in less labour-intensive light engineering, hi-tech and electronic fields (including computers and telecommunications), finance, retail and the service sectors.

But the new, competitive Britain was also a greatly polarised Britain. Once again a trench formed, but not between the classes; this time it was between the people who gained from the prosperous wave of Thatcherism and those left drowning in its wake – not only jobless, but jobless in a harsh environment. Even Thatcher fans were unhappy about the brutal and uncompromising methods favoured by the 'iron lady', but by 1988 she was the longest-serving British prime minister of the 20th century – although her repeated electoral victories were helped in no small way by the Labour Party's total incompetence and destructive internal struggles.

One of Us: A Biography of Mrs Thatcher by respected journalist and commentator Hugo Young covers the early life of the 'iron lady' and her time in power, showing that her grip on events, and on her own party, wasn't as steely as it seemed.

STAND DOWN MARGARET, HELLO TONY

When any leader believes they're invincible, it's time to go. In 1990 Mrs Thatcher was finally dumped when her introduction of the hugely unpopular 'poll tax' breached even the Conservatives' limits of tolerance. The voters regarded Labour with even more suspicion, however, allowing new Conservative leader John Major to unexpectedly win the 1992 election.

Another half-decade of political stalemate followed, as the Conservatives imploded and Labour was rebuilt on the sidelines. It all came to a head in 1997 when 'New' Labour swept to power with a record parliamentary majority, under a fresh-faced new leader named Tony Blair. After nearly 18 years of Conservative rule, it really seemed that Labour's victory call ('things can only get better') was true – and some people literally danced in the street when the results were announced.

Under Prime Minister Blair, the government disappointed old socialist stalwarts who'd expected a swing back to the left. New Labour was a more centrist force, adopting many market reforms favoured by moderate Conservatives. Ministers kept a tight rein on public spending, much to the pleasure of financial institutions. In turn, this sometimes blurred the distinction between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and forced the Conservatives to take a sizable jump to the right.

Things Can Only Get Better by John O'Farrell is a witty, self-deprecating tale of 1980s politics – the era of Conservative domination – from a struggling Labour viewpoint.

NEW LABOUR, NEW MILLENNIUM

As well as fiscal prudence, the new Labour government introduced major constitutional reforms in other areas. Devolution, at least in part, was granted to Scotland and Wales, with a Scottish Parliament established in Edinburgh,

1982	1990
Britain at war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands	Mrs Thatcher ousted as leader of the Conservative Party

and Cardiff seeing the arrival of the Welsh Assembly, reversing some of the centuries-old unification laws introduced by rulers as far back as Edward I and Henry VII. (See p748 and p652 for more devolution details.)

A general election was called in 2001, and although the main opposition parties – the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, plus the Scottish Nationalists and Plaid Cymru (the Welsh nationalists) in Wales and Scotland – regained some seats, it was still pretty much a walkover for Tony Blair and the Labour party.

In response to Labour's continued success, the Conservatives had replaced John Major in 1997 with a succession of leaders, none of whom enjoyed enough support from their party or the British public to stay around for long – allowing Mr Blair to remain at the helm of government for another half-decade.

In the election of 2005, Labour won a historic third term, although with a reduced majority of around 350 seats in Parliament (to 200 for the Conservatives, 60 for the Liberal Democrats, and around 30 for the other parties), and by 2006 Tony Blair was in his 12th year as party leader, ninth as prime minister, and was the longest-serving prime minister from the Labour Party in British history. But the honeymoon years must have seemed a distant memory as Mr Blair and his ministers were forced to deal with a seemingly unending string of problems and controversies.

LABOUR PAINS

High on the list of international issues faced by Tony Blair and his government were the ongoing war in Iraq, the legal limbo of Guantanamo Bay (called a 'symbol of injustice' by Britain's own attorney general), the conflict in Afghanistan, and the constant threat of global terrorism – the latter brought so shockingly close to home on 7 July 2005, when bombers attacked Underground trains and a bus in London, killing 52 commuters. In July 2006 these world events were topped by the conflict between the Israeli army and Hezbollah militias along the border with Lebanon, with hundreds of innocent civilians killed alongside the combatants, and Mr Blair became one of many world leaders criticised for not advocating an immediate ceasefire.

Other international issues included the expansion of the European Union to include the former Eastern-bloc countries, always linked in the British public mind to the 'threat' of economic migrants and asylum seekers coming to Britain's shores. This overlapped a controversy surrounding foreign prisoners remaining in the country on release from prison – rather than being repatriated – in turn leading to ministerial reshuffles and knee-jerk reactions that failed to get to the root of the problem: ineffective long-term 'joined-up' government.

The Unfulfilled Prime Minister: Tony Blair's Quest for a Legacy covers the period from 1997 to 2005, one of 'huge disappointment' according to author Peter Riddell.

Also on the home front, Britain's education and health systems appeared in constant crisis – despite billions of pounds of expenditure – while the controversy about the revival of Britain's nuclear power industry (promoted as a solution to the problem of global warming) gained increasing momentum. Meanwhile, revelations that civil honours, or even seats in the House of Lords, were being awarded to business leaders who just happened to be donors to the Labour Party resurrected the 'Tony's cronies' debate, although delving by the media also revealed that the Conservatives' own fundraising tactics were little different.

1997
Tony Blair and 'New' Labour Party win general election, ending 18 years of Conservative rule

1999
Devolution of power to Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly

Entering the third quarter of 2006, Tony Blair seemed determined to face all these issues and work through to the end of his term, despite increasing discomfort (and in some cases outright criticism) among members of his own party. Political commentators frequently cite the prime minister's desire to leave a 'legacy' on his departure – be it a peaceful Middle East, a democratic Iraq, a re-energised National Health Service, or maybe the fulfilment of a vision for 200 super-schools called City Academies to be built across the country.

LOOKING FORWARD

The calls for Tony Blair to announce a retirement date gathered momentum through August 2006, with some members of his party threatening outright rebellion during the first week of September. Finally, on 7 September, Mr Blair announced that he would resign within a year. No precise date was set, but many commentators believed it would be May 2007. Gordon Brown, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer (the British term for Minister of Finance) and so long the prime-minister-in-waiting, may finally get the top job and lead the battle to win a fourth term for Labour at the next general election, but his opportunity may have passed as other young guns are now waiting in the wings.

Outside of government, the Conservatives elected David Cameron as their party leader in December 2005, and Sir Menzies Campbell became leader of the Liberal Democrats in March 2006. Neither shone as a striking new political force, although Mr Cameron scored endless column inches in the newspapers when he tried to improve his green credentials by cycling to work (fine if he'd emphasised the health benefits, but any traffic-reducing claims were stymied when the press discovered his ministerial car followed close behind), and when he suggested the need for more understanding of teenage hooligans – a call instantly dubbed the 'hug a hoodie campaign' by the popular press.

As the final parts of this book were being written, the eyes and minds of politicians, newspaper editors and the British public – well, probably about half of them – were looking towards the next general election, expected in 2009, and due by 2010 at the latest. It remains to be seen if the voters will award Labour yet another term in office, or if the combination of terrible events overseas, mismanagement at home and Labour Party infighting at the heart of government will mean the political pendulum finally swings back the other way.

2003
Britain joins the US-led invasion of Iraq

2005
Tony Blair and Labour re-elected for third term

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

It's difficult to generalise about a British national psyche – mainly because there isn't one! The very idea of being 'British' is still comparatively recent (it's only been used in this context for around 200 years), whereas separate national identities in England, Wales and Scotland have existed for much longer – although if you look closely, it's Welsh and Scottish identities that are strong, whereas the distinction between 'English' and 'British' is a lot more fuzzy. In fact, many people in England have only started to consider an English (as opposed to British) national identity since Wales and Scotland achieved some political autonomy through the devolution process of the late 1990s. The writer Fay Weldon, for example, on realising that other nations in the British Isles were finding institutional identity, immediately joined the Church of England as a way to express her Englishness.

So if there *is* a British national identity, it combines aspects of the cultures of England, Wales and Scotland, as well as the island of Ireland. In addition, 'indigenous' British culture has also been greatly influenced by peoples from all over the world – the French, Russians, West Indians, Pakistanis and Somalis, to name but a few – who have immigrated here over the centuries. Despite the claims of ethnic supremacists and excitable newspapers, the British are a mongrel race – and many are happy to revel in this diversity.

For a deeper understanding of peculiar British sensibilities as you travel around, *Eccentric Britain* by Benedict le Vay is invaluable. In the same series are *Eccentric London, Eccentric Edinburgh* and *Eccentric Oxford.*

That's why today many Brits honour traditions such as Christmas trees (introduced from Germany) and maypoles (Celtic), then wash down a chicken madras curry – the nation's most popular meal – with 'foreign' lagers like Fosters or Bud. Meanwhile, their kids mix distinctive regional accents with intonations apparently perfected in Queensland or California.

Nonetheless, despite this openness to foreign influences, for many visitors there's still a preconception that the British are reserved, inhibited and stiflingly polite. Once again, it's important here not to confuse British culture with English culture, and while these characteristics may indeed apply in some parts of England (notably in the south and southeast), in general, across the whole country, they simply don't. Anywhere in Britain, if you visit a pub, a nightclub, a football match, a seaside resort or simply go walking in city parks or wild open hills, you'll soon come across other British characteristics – they're uninhibited, tolerant, exhibitionist, passionate, aggressive, sentimental, hospitable and friendly. It hits you like a breath of fresh air.

Having said all that, a major factor still running through British – and especially English – culture and society, even in these egalitarian days, is class. Although the days of peasants doffing their caps to the lord of the manor may be gone, some Brits still judge others by their school, accent or family wealth (and how long they've had it), rather than by their skills, intelligence and personality.

Some truly fascinating interviews with everyday people from around Britain have been compiled onto CD as radio-programme-style 'audio books', available from www.rovingear.co.uk. It's like listening to an interesting local in the pub…

But dig below the class barrier, or get beyond genial banter in the pub, and you'll find more surprises. A major newspaper survey in mid-2006 revealed that 25% of the UK adult population (about 9 million men and 1.4 million women) downloaded images from pornographic websites. Apparently, Britain is the fastest growing market in the world for internet porn. But the old 'no sex, please, we're British' adage has not gone away either. Also in mid-2006, a 55-year-old woman discreetly sunbathing naked in her own garden was taken to court by a neighbour and charged with 'grossly offensive' behaviour.

QUEUING FOR BRITAIN

The British are notoriously addicted to queues, be it for buses, train tickets, or to pay at the supermarket. The order is sacrosanct and woe betide any foreigner who gets this wrong. Few things are more calculated to spark an outburst of tutting – about as publicly cross as most Brits get – than 'pushing in' at a queue.

The same applies to escalators – especially in London. If you want to stand still, then keep to the right, so that people can pass on the left. There's a definite convention here and recalcitrants have been hung, drawn and quartered (well, it's at least provoked more tutting) for blocking the path of folk in a hurry.

Alongside this interest in virtual sex, statistics reveal other surprises, including British generosity: more than 80% donate to charity each year, and the annual income of the UK's charities totals almost £40 billion. There's inconsistency here as well though; people donate to Friends of the Earth but ignore their own bank's investments in the oil industry; they'll support Amnesty International but overlook their pension fund's stake in arms companies supplying the world's most brutal regimes. Fortunately, awareness is growing in Britain, and about half a million people currently have accounts with ethical banks or invest in socially responsible funds.

On a less profound level, another cultural trait that runs though British society is an obsession with hobbies and pastimes. We're not talking about obvious things like football and cricket (although fanatical supporters number in their millions), but about bird-watchers, train spotters, model makers, home improvers, pigeon fanciers, royal observers, antique hoarders, teapot collectors, ramblers, anglers, gardeners, caravanners and crossword fans. The list goes on, with many participants verging on the edge of complete madness. But it's all great, and Britain just wouldn't be the same without them.

LIFESTYLE

When it comes to family life, many British people regard the 'Victorian values' of the late 19th century as an idyllic benchmark – a time of perfect morals and harmonious nuclear families, a high point from which the country has been sliding ever since. As recently as the 1960s, only 2% of couples would 'live in sin' before getting married, whereas by 2004 'cohabiting' (there's still not a proper word for it) was perfectly acceptable in most circles; around 60% of couples who marry are already living together, and at any given time about a third of all couples living together are unmarried.

In line with this, the number of unmarried couples having children has also increased in the last 40 years; whereas 'illegitimate' children were comparatively rare and a social stigma in the 1960s, today about 40% of births in the UK each year are to unmarried couples. The 'pro-family' lobby argues that married couples provide more stability and a better environment for children. But marriage apparently provides no guarantees: currently about one in three British marriages ends in divorce.

All the above applies to heterosexual marriage of course. It's been legal for gay or lesbian couples to get hitched only since the 2005 Civil Partnership Act came into force. This was a landmark step, but there's still a way to go before full tolerance and equality is reached.

Compared to the 1950s, there are now 25% fewer marriages per year, but five times as many divorces. For more fascinating figures see www.2-in-2-1.co.uk/ukstats.

It's a similar situation when it comes to race. General tolerance prevails in most parts of Britain, with commercial organisations and official bodies such as the police trying hard to stamp out discrimination. But bigotry can still lurk close to the surface: far-right political parties won several seats in the local council elections of 2006, and it's not unusual to hear people openly discuss other races in quite unpleasant terms – in smart country pubs as much as rough city bars. And while it's no longer OK for comedians to tell racist jokes on prime-time TV (as it was until the 1980s), this type of humour still goes down well in some quarters.

Along with race, another major issue in Britain is health – with obesity a hot topic on everyone's lips. Currently over 60% of the adult population is overweight, and almost 25% is clinically obese. In late 2005 the UK had the fastest growing rate of obesity of all developed nations.

So while the Brits pig out on junk food, at least they're not smoking so much. Tobacco has moved down to second on the health-risk charts, and although it's still a major cause of disease, about 75% of the population does not smoke – the lowest figures since records began. And perhaps that's why there's been mostly support (albeit sometimes grudging) for the smoking ban due to be introduced in restaurants and many pubs in mid-2007. For more see p107.

Time to celebrate? Oh yes – with a big drink. Across the country, alcohol consumption is on the rise, with the relatively new phenomenon of 'binge drinking' among young people a major concern for doctors, police and politicians. And it's not just the boys on the booze; thanks largely to a change in social attitudes (there's no more stigma attached to a woman getting drunk than there is to a man) and the invention of sweet but strong 'alcopops', around 70% of women are drinking more than the recommended amount – up from just 10% in the mid-1990s.

And alcohol isn't the only drug. A major survey in 2004 showed that about 20% of British people had used a recreational drug during their lifetime. More recent studies estimate that about 5% of young adults uses cocaine, and about 5% of schoolchildren use ecstasy, while at any given time around 10% of the population regularly or occasionally uses cannabis. It's too early to say if the highly controversial 2005 decriminalisation of cannabis use will have any impact on these figures.

POPULATION

Britain's population is around 58 million, and growth has been virtually static in recent years (if you don't count the annual influx of about 30 million tourists). The highest concentration is in England, which has a population of 50 million, with London the largest city in the country. The other main centres in England are Birmingham (Britain's second-largest city), Manchester and Sheffield (ranking third and fourth in size), with Liverpool and Leeds not far away – in distance and size.

Wales has around three million people, with the population concentrated along the coast between Cardiff (the Welsh capital) and Swansea and in the former mining valleys running north from there. Scotland has around five million people, with the population concentrated in and around the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee. Scotland's Highland region is Britain's most sparsely populated area, with an average of just 20 people per sq mile, a legacy of the notorious Clearances (see p897).

A major characteristic of Britain's population is the so-called 'north–south divide', in reality a split between wealthy southeast England and the rest of the UK. For example, around London there are towns where high-tech jobs are on the rise and there's less than 1% unemployment. In sharp contrast, economic depression is a major issue in parts of the Midlands, northern England, south and north Wales and many parts of urban and rural Scotland – an 'archipelago of deprivation' according to one report.

However, this split is oversimplified, and across the country there are pockets of affluence in 'poor' areas, and zones of poverty just a few blocks from Millionaires' Row. But, overall, even though the cost of living in London and the southeast is much higher than elsewhere (double the price for a beer, 10 times more for a house), and despite government efforts to relocate public- and private-sector jobs to 'the regions', people – and the work opportunities that attract them – still seem relentlessly drawn to the capital and its environs.

Meanwhile, and contrary to expectations, an even more significant migration is under way. In the last decade, over one million people in Britain have moved from urban to rural areas. A 2004 report from the Countryside Agency says this is four times more than the number moving from north to south. The new country-dwellers seek a better standard of living, and many can work from home via phone and the internet. Others use their skills to set up small businesses, providing new employment opportunities for the locals – especially valuable in rural areas where traditional jobs such as farming are on the wane. But there are downsides, too, most notably the rise in rural house prices. This is pushing property beyond the reach of local inhabitants and forcing *them* to move to the towns that the incomers have just vacated.

POPULATION FIGURES

Throughout this book we give the population figures for towns and cities drawn from the 2001 national census. In some cases the numbers may have changed by the time you read this, but you'll still know if a place is a tiny village or a major metropolis.

GOING TO THE DOGS

The British are notorious for their love of animals, and this passion extends especially to pets. Foreigners may notice that while striking up a conversation with a stranger is unusual, many locals are quite happy to talk to another person's dog.

This special affection means dogs can get away with anything. On city streets, pet dogs on leads obstruct pedestrians and crap all over the footpaths. In the countryside, pet dogs chase sheep, disturb wildlife and – you guessed it – crap all over the footpaths. Of course, we can't blame the dogs; it's the owners who are at fault. Although pooper-scoopers have made a big impact in recent years, the antisocial habits of pet dogs are tolerated to an incredible degree by most Brits.

Such is the tolerance that many dog owners let their pets run around in blatant disregard of 'Keep Dogs on Lead' signs. If you're terrified by the unwanted attentions of a poorly trained mutt while you're out walking in a park or the countryside, be prepared for the usual response from the owner – 'Don't worry, he's only being friendly'.

SPORT

If you want to take a short cut into the heart of British culture, watch the British at play. They're fierce and passionate about their sport, whether participating or watching. The mood of the nation is more closely aligned to the success of its international teams in major competition than to budget announcements from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or even the weather.

The British invented – or at least laid down the modern rules for – many of the world's most popular spectator sports, including cricket, tennis, rugby and football. Trouble is, the national teams aren't always so good at playing them (as the newspapers continually like to remind us), although recent years have seen some notable success stories. But a mixed result doesn't dull enthusiasm for the fans. Every weekend, thousands of people turn out to cheer their favourite team, and sporting highlights such as Wimbledon or the Derby keep the entire nation enthralled, while the biggest sporting event of all – the Olympic Games – is coming to London in 2012.

This section gives an overview of spectator sports you might see as part of your travels around Britain; the regional chapters have more details. For information on participation sports, see p83.

Football (Soccer)

Despite what the fans may say in Madrid or São Paulo, the English football league has some of the finest teams and players in the world. They're the richest too, with multimillion-pound sponsorship deals regularly clinched by powerful agents.

At the top of the tree is the Premier League for the country's top 20 clubs, although the hegemony enjoyed by superclubs Arsenal, Liverpool and globally renowned (and part US-owned) Manchester United has been challenged in recent years by former underdogs Chelsea, thanks to the seemingly bottomless budget of Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

For dates and details of football, cricket, horse racing and other events in Britain tomorrow, next week or next month, start with the sports pages of www.whatsonwhen.com.

Down from the premiership, 72 other teams play in the three divisions called the Championship, League One and League Two. The Scottish Premier League is dominated by Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic (p797). In Wales, football is comparatively less popular, although some of the bigger teams such as Wrexham, Cardiff City and Swansea City play in the lower English leagues.

The football season lasts from August to May, so seeing a match can easily be included in most visitors' itineraries – but tickets for the big games in the upper division are like gold dust, and cost £20 to £50 even if you're lucky enough to find one. Your best chance might be websites like www.sportstoursinternational.co.uk – offering tickets along with travel and accommodation.

If you can't get in to see the big names, tickets for lower-division games are cheaper and more easily available – either on the spot, ordered through a club website, or through a specialist such as www.ticketmaster.co.uk or www.myticketmarket.com.

Rugby

A wit once said that football was a gentlemen's game played by hooligans, while rugby was the other way around. That may be true, and rugby is very popular, especially since England became world champions in 2004; it's worth catching a game for the display of skill (OK, and brawn), and the fun atmosphere on the terraces. Tickets cost around £15 to £40 depending on the club's status and fortunes.

There are two variants of the game: rugby union is played in southern England, Wales and Scotland, while rugby league is the main sport in northern England, although there is a lot of crossover. Many rules and tactics of both 'codes' are similar, although in rugby league (unlike rugby union) tackled players regain their feet, and heel the ball backwards to a team-mate. After six tackles, the other team gets possession of the ball. Other major differences include there being only 13 players in each team (ostensibly making the game faster), while rugby union sides have 15 players each.

The main season for club matches is roughly September to Easter, while the international rugby union calendar is dominated by the annual Six Nations Championship (England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy) between January and April. It's usual for the Scots to support Wales, or vice versa, when either team is playing 'old enemy' England. Scots will enthusiastically support France too – keeping alive memories of the Auld Alliance (see p46), but it's all very good-natured, really.

RUGBY ROOTS

Rugby traces its origins to a football match in 1823 at Rugby School, in Warwickshire in the English Midlands. A player called William Ellis, frustrated at the limitations of mere kicking, reputedly picked up the ball and ran with it towards the opponents' goal. True to the British sense of fair play, rather than Ellis being dismissed from the game, a whole new sport was developed around his tactic, and the Rugby Football Union was formally inaugurated in 1871.

THE SWEET FA CUP

The (English) Football Association held its first interclub knockout tournament in 1871. Fifteen clubs took part, playing for a nice piece of silverware called the FA Cup – then worth about £20.

Nowadays, around 600 clubs compete for this legendary and priceless trophy. It differs from many other competitions in that every team – from the lowest-ranking part-timers to the stars of the Premier League – is in with a chance. The preliminary rounds begin in August, and the world-famous Cup Final is held in May. It's been staged at Wembley for decades, with a few years out at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium while the national ground was rebuilt.

The team with the most FA Cup victories is Manchester United (a total of 10), but public attention – and affection – is invariably focused on the 'giant-killers' – minor clubs that claw their way up through the rounds, unexpectedly beating higher-ranking competitors. The best known giant-killing event occurred in 1992, when Wrexham, then ranked 24th in Division 3, famously beat league champions Arsenal. Other shocks include non-league Kidderminster Harriers' 1994 defeats of big boys Birmingham City and Preston North End, and Oldham Athletic beating premier leaguers Manchester City in 2005.

Scotland has its own FA Cup competition, first held in 1874. The cup itself is the original, making it the oldest football trophy in the world. One of the most famous giant-killings north of the border was when mighty Celtic was humbled in 2000 by lowly Inverness Caledonian Thistle, inspiring the immortal tabloid headline 'Super Caley go ballistic; Celtic are atrocious'.

In recent years, competitions such as the Premier League and Champions League (against European teams) have a higher profile, bigger kudos, and simply more money to play with. But nothing raises community spirit more than a town team doing better than expected. Gates are down, and perhaps the FA Cup will one day be consigned to history – but what a sweet and glorious history it's been!

Cricket

Cricket became an international game during Britain's colonial era, when it was exported to the countries of the Commonwealth, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, the West Indies and Australasia.

To outsiders (and some locals) the rules and terminology may appear ridiculously arcane and confusing, and progress seems so *slow*. Surely, say the nonbelievers, this is the game for which TV highlights were invented, but for aficionados the game provides 'resolute and graceful confrontations within an intricate and psychologically thrilling framework'. OK, the quote is from a cricket fan. Nonetheless, at least one cricket match should feature in your travels around Britain. If you're patient and learn the intricacies, you could find cricket as enriching and enticing as all the Brits (and especially the English) who remain glued to their radio or PC all summer, 'just to see how the cricket's going'.

One-day games and five-day test matches are played against sides such as Australia and the West Indies at landmark grounds like Lords in London, Edgbaston in Birmingham and Headingley in Leeds. Test match tickets cost £25 to £100 and tend to sell fast. County championships usually charge £10 to £15, and rarely sell out. Watching a local game on the village green is free of charge.

Golf

Details on playing golf are on p89, but if you want to watch men with sticks hit little white balls (and it is mostly men's golf that draws the crowds), the main event is the British Open, known to all as simply 'the Open'. It's played every July in rotation on nine courses around the country: 2007 Carnoustie; 2008 Royal Birkdale; 2009 Turnberry; 2010 St Andrews ('the birthplace of golf' – see p846). Other important competitions include the British Amateur Championship and the Welsh Open at Celtic Manor Hotel near Newport, south Wales – the course for 2010's Ryder Cup. Spectator tickets start at about £10, going up to £75 for a good position at the major events.

Horse Racing

There's a horse race somewhere in Britain pretty much every day, but the top event in the calendar is Royal Ascot in mid-June, when even the Queen turns up to put a fiver each way on Lucky Boy in the 3.15. For details see www.royalascot.co.uk.

Other highlights include the Grand National steeplechase at Aintree in early April, and the Derby, run at Epsom on the first Saturday in June. The latter is especially popular with the masses so, unlike Ascot, you won't see morning suits and outrageous hats anywhere.

Queen Elizabeth II is a great horse-racing fan, with 19 Ascot winners to date from the royal stables. The 2005 Grand National clashed with Prince Charles' marriage; rumours abound that the start was delayed so the Queen could attend the nuptials *and* see the race.

Tennis

Tennis is widely played at club and regional levels, but the best known tournament is the All England Championships – Wimbledon – when tennis fever sweeps through the country for the last week of June and the first week of July. In between matches, the crowds traditionally feast on strawberries and cream. That's 28 tonnes of strawberries and 7000L of cream annually, to be precise.

Current British tennis darlings are Tim Henman and Andrew Murray, and demand for seats at Wimbledon always outstrips supply, but to give everyone an equal chance the tickets are sold (unusually) through a public ballot. You can also take your chance on the spot: about 6000 tickets are sold each day (but not the last four days) and queuing at dawn should get you into the ground. For details see www.wimbledon.org.

MEDIA

Newspapers

Breakfast need never be boring in Britain. For such a small country, there's a huge range of newspapers to read over your cornflakes.

The bottom end of the market is occupied by easy-to-read tabloids, full of sensational 'exclusives' and simplistic political coverage. The *Sun* is a national institution with mean-spirited content and headlines based on outrageous puns – a good combination apparently, as it's Britain's biggest-selling paper, with a circulation of around three million and a readership of around nine million. The *Daily Mirror,* once the 'paper of the workers', tried to compete head-on with the *Sun* for a while, then rediscovered its left-of-centre, pro-Labour heritage. The *Daily Sport* takes bad taste to the extreme, with stories of aliens and celebrities (sometimes in the same report), and pictures of semi-naked women of improbable proportions.

The *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* bill themselves as middle-market, but are little different to the tabloids, both thunderously right-of-centre with a steady stream of crime and scare stories about threatening immigrants and rampant homosexuals. Some may find this diet distasteful, but about eight million readers don't.

SPORTING COVERAGE

Perhaps surprisingly, unlike many countries, Britain has no dedicated large-circulation sports newspaper (apart from perhaps the *Sportsman,* concentrating mainly on the betting angle). But read the excellent coverage in the back pages of the *Daily Telegraph,* the *Times* and the *Guardian* and you'll see there's no need for one. The tabloid newspapers also cover sport, especially if a star has been caught with their pants down. Talking of which, despite the name, the *Daily Sport* is not a sports paper, unless photos of glamour models wearing only a pair of Arsenal socks counts as 'sport'.

At the upper end of the market are the broadsheets: the *Daily Telegraph* is right-of-centre and easily outsells its rivals; the *Times* is conservative, Murdoch-owned, thorough and influential; the *Guardian* is left-of-centre and innovative; and the *Independent* lives up to its title. 'Tabloid' and 'broadsheet' have always referred more to substance than actual dimensions, but the distinction is now totally content-based as several serious papers are also issued in handy-to-carry sizes.

Most dailies have Sunday stablemates (the *Sunday Mirror, Sunday Express, Sunday Telegraph* and so on) and there's also the long-standing liberal-slanted *Observer*. The weekend broadsheets are filled more with comment and analysis than hot news, and on their day of rest the British settle in armchairs to plough through endless supplements; the *Sunday Times* alone comes in 12 different parts, and must destroy a rainforest every issue.

Most of the papers mentioned here are available all over Britain, but can have an English bias, so Scotland maintains a flock of home-grown dailies. These include the *Scotsman* – aligned with the Liberal Democrats – and the popular tabloid *Daily Record*. The *Herald,* founded in 1783, is the oldest daily in the English-speaking world, and the *Sunday Post* is a bestseller. In Wales, the *Western Mail* is the national daily, with *Wales on Sunday* taking over at weekends.

There are also local and regional papers throughout Britain. These range from the *Evening Standard,* London's commuter favourite, and city dailies like the *Manchester News* or *Swansea Evening Post* – the latter famous as the paper where Dylan Thomas cut his journalistic teeth – to quaint country-town weeklies.

Want to scan the papers online? Find them at *Daily Express* (www.express.co.uk), *Daily Telegraph* (www.telegraph.co.uk), *Guardian* (www.guardianunlimited.co.uk), *Independent* (www.independent.co.uk), *Mirror* (www.mirror.co.uk), *Sun* (www.the-sun.co.uk), *Times (*www.the-times.co.uk).

TV & Radio

Alongside the wide range of newsprint stands an equally wide range of TV and radio. The BBC is the country's leading broadcaster and a venerable institution, with several channels of the world's best programming dominating national radio and free-to-air TV. Foreigners are frequently amazed that public service broadcasting can produce such a range of professional, innovative, up-to-date and stimulating programmes. All this – and without adverts too! – although ever-increasing competition from cable and satellite channels means some shows tend to be dumbed down as ratings are chased, especially as the majority of households now have digital receivers, in preparation for the analogue switch-off scheduled for 2012.

The main BBC TV stations are BBC One and BBC Two; others include BBC Three, BBC Four, News24 and some children's channels. Major commercial broadcasters include ITV and Channel 4 – both with several channels. Satellite broadcasting is heavily dominated by Sky, part of the gargantuan News International Corporation.

Turning to radio, the main BBC stations include Radio 1, playing everything from syrupy pop to underground garage, with a predominantly young audience and some truly inane presenters. When you get too old for this, tune into Radio 2, playing favourites from the 1960s to today, plus country, jazz and world music, with presenters who also got too old for Radio 1. Predominantly classical music is played on Radio 3, but this station also goes into roots and world music, while media gem Radio 4 offers a mix of news, comment, current affairs, drama and humour. Other BBC stations include Radio 5 Live (a mix of sport and talk) and Radio 7 (drama and humour).

Alongside the BBC are many commercial radio broadcasters. Every city has at least one music station, while national stations include pop-orientated Virgin Radio and pleasantly nonhighbrow classical specialist Classic FM. To find the right spot on the dial, see p949.

RELIGION

The Church of England (or Anglican Church) was founded in the 16th century at the behest of Henry VIII, and today remains wealthy and influential – even in these increasingly secular times. It's traditionally conservative, and predominantly Conservative (sometimes called 'the Tory Party at prayer'); only since 1994 have women been ordained as priests. The debate has now moved on to the rights and wrongs of gay clergy.

In the 2001 national census, around 35 million people stated their religion as Christian, and although many write 'C of E' when filling in forms, only about a million attend Sunday services. Other Christian faiths include Roman Catholic (about 10% of the population), plus sizable groups of Methodists, Baptists and other nonconformists – most notably in Wales, where the Anglican Church ceased to be the established church way back in the 1920s, and the Church–Chapel divide between the Protestant and nonconformist faiths is still clearly evident. In Scotland you'll find the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland with its spin-off minorities, the United Free Presbyterians and the Free Church of Scotland (known as the Wee Frees). Generally, attendances are down every year at mainstream churches across Britain, with evangelical and charismatic churches the only ones attracting growing congregations.

The 2001 census also recorded around 1.5 million Muslims in Britain (about 3% of the population). Other faiths include Hindu (1%), Sikh (0.7%), Jewish (0.5%) and Buddhist (0.3%). Nowadays more non-Christians regularly visit their places of worship than do all the Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists and Baptists combined – especially if you include those druids at Stonehenge, and all those wags that amusingly wrote 'Jedi Knight' in the 'Other' category on the census form.

ARTS

Literature

Modern English literature – that is, poetry and prose in the English language – starts around 1387 (yes, that's modern in history-soaked Britain) with *The Canterbury Tales,* Geoffrey Chaucer's classic collection of fables, stories and morality tales using travelling pilgrims – the Knight, the Wife of Bath, the Nun's Priest and so on – as a narrative hook. For more background see the boxed text, p193.

Two centuries later, enter William Shakespeare. Still Britain's best known playwright, he was pretty good at poems too. The famous line 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' comes from sonnet No 18. In all he penned more than 150.

Then came the metaphysical poets of the early 17th century. Their vivid imagery and far-fetched conceits or comparisons daringly pushed the boundaries. In *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,* for instance, John Donne compares two lovers with the points of a compass. Racy stuff in its day.

Perhaps you're more familiar with *Auld Lang Syne,* traditionally sung at New Year throughout Britain. It was penned by prolific 18th-century poet and lyricist Robert Burns. His more unusual *Address to a Haggis* plays an important part of 'Burns Night', a Scottish celebration held on 25 January. For more on Robert Burns, see p815.

The stars of the 19th century were the Romantics. John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron wrote with emotion, exulting the senses and power of the imagination, and were particularly passionate about nature. The best known Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, lived in the Lake District, and his famous lines from *Daffodils,* 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', were inspired by a hike in the hills.

YDACH CHI YN GALLU SIARAD CYMRAEG?

That means 'Can you speak Welsh?', and it's the widespread survival of Welsh as a national living language that marks out Wales so distinctly from the rest of Britain. Other indigenous British languages include Scots Gaelic (spoken by around 80,000 people in the Highlands and islands), Manx (on the Isle of Man) and Cornish (Cornwall), but as a tourist in Britain, it's Welsh you're most likely to come across.

The origins of Welsh go back thousands of years. It's an Indo-European language, with the same root as English (despite its weird-looking double Ls and strings of consecutive consonants), but its history is quite different. When the Acts of Union in 1536 formally linked Wales and England (see p48) officials had to speak English as well as Welsh. In other circumstances Welsh may have started to fade, but Bishop Morgan's translation of the Bible in 1588 played an important part in keeping the language alive, and during the 17th and 18th centuries the nonconformist faiths that made such headway in Wales also supported the native language.

The rot set in during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, when a whole new ruling class of landlords and employers came from England, and from then on the number of Welsh speakers went into steep decline. In 1801 about 80% of the population spoke Welsh; by 1901 this had sunk to 50%. Through the following decades numbers continued to fall, and it wasn't until the 1960s that Welsh speakers started to make a determined fightback.

The first victory was the 1967 Welsh Language Act that ensured that Welsh speakers could use their own language in court. In the 1980s and '90s things really took off, with much revived interest across Wales, not least among incomers. In 1982 Channel 4 set up Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C – Channel 4 Wales), which still broadcasts Welsh TV programmes daily, and in 1988 a Welsh Language Board was set up to advise the secretary of state for Wales on everything to do with the language. In 1994 a new Welsh Language Act gave equal validity to Welsh as a language for use in public-sector businesses.

Today about 20% of people in Wales speak Welsh as a first language, and for many more it's a strong second tongue. As you travel around, you'll notice all road signs are bilingual – although don't be surprised if the English words have been daubed out in green paint, a sign that nationalist feelings still remain strong in some areas.

See p977 for more information about Welsh and Scottish Gaelic.

The Romantic movement produced a genre called 'literary Gothic', exemplified by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and satirised in *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen, still one of Britain's best known and best loved novelists; intrigues and passions boiling under the stilted preserve of provincial middle-class social convention are beautifully portrayed in *Emma* and *Pride & Prejudice*.

Next came the reign of Queen Victoria and the era of industrial expansion, so key novels of the time explored social and political issues. In *Oliver Twist,* Charles Dickens captures the lives of young thieves in the London slums, and in *Hard Times* he paints a brutal picture of capitalism's excesses. Meanwhile, Thomas Hardy's classic *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* deals with the peasantry's decline, and *The Trumpet Major* paints a picture of idyllic English country life interrupted by war and encroaching modernity. North of the border, Sir Walter Scott produced the classic Scottish novel *Waverley,* set in the time of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. (For more on Scott, see p803.)

Of the Brontë family's prodigious output, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is the best known – an epic tale of obsession and revenge, where the dark and moody landscape plays as great a role as any human character.

Other major figures from this era are the Brontë sisters. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are classics of passion, mystery and love. Fans still flock to Haworth (p516), their former home, perched on the edge of the wild Pennine moors that inspired so many books.

Also popular at this time were two Scottish novelists: Robert Louis Stevenson, best known for his children's books *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped;* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, inventor of detective Sherlock Holmes who, with sidekick Watson, starred in a string of murder mysteries.

In the 20th century, the pace of writing increased. A landmark was the 1908 success of Welsh poet WH Davies, whose *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* contained the immortal words 'What is this life if, full of care/We have no time to stand and stare?'.

A few years later, inspired by the tragedy of WWI, poet Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* is romantic and idealistic, while Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est* is harshly cynical about the 'glory' of war. DH Lawrence, their contemporary, picked up the theme of change and produced *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow,* novels set in the English Midlands that follow the lives and loves of generations as the country changes from 19th-century idyll to the modern world we recognise today. In 1928 Lawrence further pushed his explorations of sexuality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – initially banned as pornographic. Torrid affairs are no great shakes today, but the quality of the writing still shines.

For extra insight while travelling, the *Oxford Literary Guide to Great Britain and Ireland* gives details of towns, villages and countryside immortalised by writers.

Other highlights of the interwar years included EM Forster's *A Passage to India,* about the hopelessness of British colonial rule, and Daphne du Maurier's romantic suspense novel *Rebecca,* set on the Cornish coast. Evelyn Waugh gave us *Brideshead Revisited* and Richard Llewellyn wrote the Welsh classic *How Green Was My Valley*. In a different world entirely, JRR Tolkien published *The Hobbit,* trumping it some 20 years later with his awesome trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*.

After WWII, Compton Mackenzie lifted postwar spirits with *Whisky Galore,* a comic novel about a cargo of booze washed up from a sinking ship onto a Scottish island. Elsewhere, a less whimsical breed of writer emerged. George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* his closely observed studies of totalitarian rule, while the Cold War inspired Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana,* in which a secret agent studies the workings of a vacuum cleaner to inspire fictitious spying reports.

Another spook of that period was Ian Fleming's full-blooded hero James Bond – better known today as a movie franchise. He first appeared in 1953 in the book *Casino Royale,* then swashbuckled through numerous thrillers for another decade. Meanwhile, TH White's *The Once and Future King* covers battles of a different time – the magical world of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

The 20th century was also a great time for poets. Landmarks include WH Auden's *Funeral Blues* (still his most popular work thanks to a role in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) and TS Eliot's epic *The Wasteland,* although he is better know for *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* – turned into the musical *Cats* by Andrew Lloyd Webber. In the 1960s writer Roger McGough and friends determined to make art relevant to daily life and produced *The Mersey Sound* – landmark pop poetry for the streets.

Different again was the harsh, gritty verse of Ted Hughes, sometimes renowned as much for the stormy relationship with his wife (American poet Sylvia Plath) as for his works, although in 1984 he became poet laureate of England, until his death in 1998. Meanwhile, Dylan Thomas, also known for his energetic social diary, came to the fore with *Portrait of The Artist As A Young Dog,* although his most celebrated work is a radio play *Under Milk Wood* (1954), exposing the tensions of small-town Wales (for more on the setting for *Under Milk Wood*, see p673).

Then came the swinging '60s and '70s. New writers included Muriel Spark, who introduced the world to a highly unusual Edinburgh school mistress in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* and Martin Amis, who was just 24 in 1973 when he wrote *The Rachel Papers,* a witty, minutely observed story of sexual obsession in puberty. Since then Amis has published many books, including *London Fields* and *The Information,* all greeted with critical acclaim and high sales. Similarly, Ian McEwan was one of Britain's angriest young novelists, earning the nickname Ian Macabre for his early work like *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers,* but in 1998 he cracked the establishment and became a Booker Prize winner with *Amsterdam*.

In contrast, authors Sebastian Faulks and Louis de Bernières struggled for recognition, then hit the jackpot with later works. Their respective novels *Birdsong,* a perfect study of passion and the horrors of WWI, and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin,* a tale of love, war and life on a Greek island, were massive sellers in the 1990s.

Contemporary novels in a different vein include 1993's *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, a deep, dark look at Edinburgh's drug culture and the start of a new genre coined 'Tartan Noir'. Other successful modern Scottish novelists include Iain Banks (who also writes sci-fi under the cunning pseudonym of Iain M Banks) and Ian Rankin, whose Detective Inspector Rebus novels are always eagerly awaited. (For more on Rankin and fellow Scottish writers, see p753.)

Another notable work of the same era was *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, about the hopes and fears of a group of suburban Anglo-Asians in London, and a forerunner of the many multicultural tales that dominate bestseller lists today.

As the Pennine moors haunt Brontë novels, so the marshy Cambridgeshire Fens dominate *Waterland* by Graham Swift – a tale of personal and national history, betrayal and compassion, and a landmark work of the 1980s.

As English literature entered the new millennium, two of the biggest-selling British authors were JK Rowling and Phillip Pulman; Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Pulman's *His Dark Materials* series took children's literature to a level where they could be seriously enjoyed by adults too.

Back in the real world, Zadie Smith was only 25 when *White Teeth* became a major hit of 2000. She followed it with the equally hyped, and almost as good, *The Autograph Man* and *On Beauty,* the latter winning the prestigious Orange Prize for Fiction in 2006.

Other star novelists covering (loosely defined) 'multicultural Britain' themes include Monica Ali, whose *Brick Lane* was shortlisted for the 2003 Man Booker Prize, and Hari Kunzru, who received one of the largest advances in publishing history in 2002 for his debut *The Impressionist*. His second novel *Transmission* was published in 2004. The same year, *Small Island* by Andrea Levy won the Orange Prize for her novel about a Jamaican couple settled in 1950s London. The author is of Jamaican origin and draws on rich family memories of the time. Two years later, the book won the best-in-10-years 'Orange of Orange' award.

Also set in London are Alan Hollinghurst's 2004 Booker Prize winner *The Line of Beauty,* about high-society gays in the 1980s Thatcher era, and *The Book of Dave* by prolific novelist, journalist, broadcaster and social commentator Will Self, published in 2006. Although ostensibly fanciful (a new religion based on the rantings of a grumpy taxi driver), like many of Self's works it's a wonderfully incisive satire on urban lifestyles in 21st-century Britain. An earlier collection of short stories, *Grey Area,* revels in more skewed and surreal aspects of the capital. Meanwhile, Martin Amis produced the darkly stylised and frankly confusing *Yellow Dog* in 2002 and Nick Hornby left lad-lit behind and displayed a deeper maturity in 2006's darkly comic *A Long Way Down*. Other 2006 highlights included Irvine Welsh's *Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs,* a study of modern-day fixations – food, drugs, sex and celebrity – with a nod to Dorian Gray thrown in for good measure.

Nick Hornby is easily lumped in the lad-lit bracket, but *Fever Pitch* (about football and relationships) and *High Fidelity* (about music and relationships) are spot-on studies of young bloke-ishness.

On the verse front, a highlight of 2006 was long-standing and prolific poet Fleur Adcock winning the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Although she had published at least 10 books, press attention focused on a single line in a single poem, about dreaming of kissing John Prescott, written *before* the Deputy Prime Minister's extramarital affair with an aide was made public. Spooky.

But perhaps the biggest literary highlight of the year was the record-breaking £5 million five-book autobiography deal signed by footballer Wayne Rooney, star of Manchester United and England's 2006 World Cup campaign. As more than one cynic has already noted, the signature is likely to be Rooney's only written contribution; in reality, the book will be ghosted by an experienced sports columnist.

In a world of hype, the publishing of books these days may be as much about PR and marketing as it is about the quality of the writing, but critics agree that the desire for big names and an eagerness to chase (or invent) new themes has at least revitalised the industry.

Cinema

In the early years of the 20th century, silent movies from Britain gave the Americans a run for their money, and *Blackmail* by Alfred Hitchcock – still one of Britain's best known film directors – launched the British film industry's era of sound production in 1929.

www.screenonline.org.uk – the website of the British Film Institute – has complete coverage of Britain's film and TV industry.

How Green Was My Valley, a tale of everyday life in the coal-mining villages of Wales, was made in 1941. Still perhaps the best known Welsh film of all time, it also annoys more Welsh people than any other, as it features stereotypical characters and no Welsh actors, and was shot in a Hollywood studio. It is worth a watch, though, for a taste of the period.

After a decline in film output during WWII, the British film recovery in the 1940s and '50s was led by Ealing Studios with a series of eccentric comedies, such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* starring Alec Guinness.

Passport to Pimlico is an Ealing Studios film classic, the story of a London suburb declaring independence from the rest of the country.

More serious box-office hits of the time included *Hamlet,* starring Laurence Olivier (the first British film to win an Oscar in the Best Picture category) and Carol Reed's *The Third Man*. An absolute classic of the era is *Brief Encounter,* directed by David Lean, who went on to make *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*.

Super-sleuth James Bond arrived on the big screen in 1962, with *Dr No* starring Scotland's very own Sean Connery. Since then about 20 Bond movies have been made, and Bond has been played by other British actors including Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton and, in 2006, Daniel Craig. More recent producers have brought a somewhat chauvinistic Bond into the modern age, with the enlightened casting of Dame Judi Dench as Bond's boss, 'M'.

By the end of the 1960s, British film production had declined again and didn't pick up until David Puttnam's *Chariots of Fire* won four Oscars in 1981.

Brief Encounter is frequently cited as a milestone in British cinema – a film where the drama comes from the acting (Trevor Howard and Celia Johnstone) rather than the set (uninspiring suburbs and railway-station buffets). It's a story of unexpected love and smouldering sexual attraction that can never be fulfilled.

Perhaps inspired by this success, TV company Channel 4 began financing films for the large and small screen, one of the first being *My Beautiful Laundrette* – a story of multicultural life and love in the Thatcher era. The following year, Richard Attenborough's big-budget epic *Gandhi* carried off eight Oscars including best director and best picture, while another classic of the 1980s was *Withnail and I,* staring Richard E Grant and Paul McGann.

The 1990s saw another minor renaissance in British film-making, ushered in by *Four Weddings and a Funeral,* featuring US star Andie MacDowell and introducing Hugh Grant as a likable and self-deprecating Englishman. This spearheaded a genre of 'Brit-flicks', including *Secrets and Lies,* a Palme d'Or winner at Cannes, *Bhaji on the Beach,* a quirky East-meets-West-meets-Blackpool road movie, *The Full Monty,* which in 1997 became Britain's most successful film ever, *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain,* an affectionate story about a peak in north Wales that was too short, and *Trainspotting,* a hard-hitting film about Edinburgh's drugged-out underbelly that launched the careers of Scottish actors Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlyle. Other British stars more frequently seen in Hollywood these days include Welsh thespians Anthony Hopkins and Catherine Zeta Jones.

More great films of the 1990s include *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels,* going on to spawn a host of gangster copycats, *East is East,* a beautifully understated study of the clash between first- and second-generation immigrant Pakistanis in Britain, and the Oscar-winning series of *Wallace and Gromit* animations, while *Breaking the Waves* is a perfect study of culture clash in 1970s Scotland, and *Human Traffic* is an edgy romp through Cardiff's clubland. Also released was *Notting Hill,* set in one of the most multicultural suburbs in the whole of Britain, staring Julia Roberts with Hugh Grant as, yes, a likable and self-deprecating Englishman, and possibly most famous for managing to include only Caucasian extras in the street scenes. Much more enjoyable was *Sense and Sensibility,* with English doyens Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet as the Dashwood sisters, and Hugh Grant as, you guessed it, a likable and self-deprecating Englishman.

Chariots of Fire is an inspiring dramatisation of a true story: the progress of two athletes from university to the 1924 Olympics, their friendship and rivalry, and – for one of them – the conflict of sport with faith. When receiving his Oscars, the director boasted: 'the British are coming'.

Award-winning Welsh-language films of the 1990s include *Hedd Wynn,* a heartbreaking story of a poet killed in WWI, and *Soloman and Gaenor,* a passionate tale of forbidden love at the turn of the 20th century.

A classic of the Brit-flick genre, and a great success of 2000, was *Billy Elliot,* yet another film with Britain's declining industry as backdrop, but also about people rising above it, particularly the son of a hardened coal-miner who strives to becomes a ballet dancer. In contrast, *About a Boy* was a feel-good movie about a dating ploy leading unexpectedly to fatherly responsibilities, staring the ever-popular Hugh Grant as (surprise, surprise) a likable and self-deprecating Englishman. Meanwhile, *Bend it like Beckham* addressed more fundamental themes: growing up, first love, sex, class, race – and football.

Despite the success stories of the 1990s, as we go through the first decade of the 21st century the UK film industry has returned to its customary precarious financial state. Advocates call for more government funding, as in reality most UK-made and UK-set films are paid for with US money – epitomised perhaps by the globally renowned series of Harry Potter adventures, starting with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 2001, with roughly a movie per year as we follow the schoolboy wizard through at least six years of education. (To visit parts of Britain where Harry Potter and many other films have been made, see www.visitbritain.com/moviemap or the Britain on Location itinerary, p33.)

A film about love, betrayal, brass bands, coal-mine closures and the breakdown of society in 1980s England, *Brassed Off* makes you laugh, then cry, and shouldn't be missed.

Other notable British films of this decade (so far) include: *Shaun of the Dead,* a great low-budget horror spoof where the hero fails to notice walking corpses because most of his neighbours are zombies at the best of times; *24 Hour Party People,* about the iconic Hacienda Club and all-round pop excess in 1980s Manchester; *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy,* already a cult book and radio series; *Tristram Shandy: A Cock & Bull Story,* an outrageously witty, deliberately meandering and multilayered take on the 'unfilmable' classic English novel, staring two of Britain's top comics; Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride,* animated necrophilia and Gothic fun for the whole family; *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse Of The Were-Rabbit,* another handcrafted marvel from director Nick Park; and *Confetti,* a 'mockumentary' charting three couples' attempts to win the title of 'Most Original Wedding of the Year'.

A highlight of 2006 was *Pride and Prejudice,* another Jane Austen masterpiece skilfully adapted for the silver screen, filmed in Derbyshire and Lincolnshire and starring Keira Knightly (a long way from *Bend it like Beckham*), along with fellow British stars Matthew MacFadyen, Brenda Blethyn and the perennial Judi Dench.

Bride & Prejudice is another Austen-inspired movie, this time with singing, dancing and outrageous Bollywood panache.

The same year saw the release of the massively hyped *Stormbreaker*, dubbed by some as ‘Harry Potter meets James Bond meets Bruce Lee’, and (with a slightly smaller budget) *Love + Hate*, a quintessential Brit-flick sharing some themes with *Pride and Prejudice*, although forbidden passions run across race lines rather than class, and instead of the scenic Peak District in 1803 the setting is the modern-day post-industrial landscape of northern England.

Music

POP & ROCK

Since the dawn of the swinging ’60s, Britain has been firmly on the main stage – with access all areas – of pop and rock music’s colourful history. Major early exports were the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Kinks, and Welsh soul man Tom Jones, followed in the 1970s by stardust-speckled heroes like the Bay City Rollers, Marc Bolan and David Bowie. Other big-name artists of the time – in some cases even still performing – include Cream (featuring Eric Clapton), the Faces (starring Rod Stewart), Genesis (initially fronted by Peter Gabriel and later by Phil Collins) and Roxy Music (featuring for a while the highly influential Brian Eno), plus Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Queen and Elton John – all very different but all globally renowned, and with some, such as Bowie, still producing decent material today.

In the late ’70s and early ’80s, the self-indulgent ‘prog rock’ of the ‘dinosaur bands’ was replaced by punk music. It was energetic, anarchic (‘here’s three chords, now form a band’ ran a famous fanzine quote) and frequently tuneless, but punk was great fun and returned pop to grass-roots level – at least for a while. The infamous Sex Pistols produced one album and a clutch of (mostly banned) singles, while more prolific were the Clash, the Damned, the Buzzcocks, the Stranglers and the UK Subs.

Punk begat ‘New Wave’ (ie everything that was a bit punky), with leading exponents including the Jam, the Tourists and Elvis Costello. This merged briefly with the ska revival of the 1980s led by the Specials, influencing bands such as Madness and the Beat. Meanwhile, a punk-and-reggae-influenced trio called the Police – fronted by bassist Sting – became one of the biggest names of the decade, and gothic lost boys the Cure carved their own existential post-punk path.

Around the same time, heavy metal enjoyed an upsurge, with bands like Black Sabbath (featuring once-again-famous Ozzy Osbourne) and Judas Priest exporting soulful melodies and intriguing interpretations of established religion to concert halls worldwide.

LIVE & KICKING

In Britain you’re never short of live music. London and several other cities have stadiums and world-class concert halls for major pop, rock, jazz and classical events, and across the country there’s a massive choice of smaller venues where the less-well-known do their thing. Bands large and small are pretty much guaranteed to play in London, but often tour extensively, so a weekend break in Blackpool, Sheffield or Glasgow could include seeing a band at the Tower Ballroom, the legendary Leadmill or King Tut’s. Down the scale again, you can hear great sounds (and some really dire stuff) in pubs and small clubs everywhere. As well as local listings, countrywide agencies like **See** (www.seetickets.com) are useful for planning, while the **Indie Travel Guide** (www.indietravelguide.com) features local bands, venues and clubs across Britain (and beyond). North of the border, **Gigs in Scotland** (www.gigsinscotland.com) is the absolute authority. Options for live music are of course more restricted in the countryside – but then you’re in the wrong place for bright lights and decibels anyway…

WAIT, THERE’S MORE

This section concentrates on pop and rock. Of course, Britain enjoys many other rich and diverse musical genres – jazz, folk, roots, fusion, banghra, R&B, drum’n’bass, dance, techno, chill-out, dub, gospel, urban, hip-hop and so on – but we simply haven’t got the space to cover them here.

The ever-changing 1980s also saw a surge of electronica with the likes of Depeche Mode and Cabaret Voltaire, and the rise of New Romantic bands such as Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran and Culture Club – all frills and fringes, and a definite swing of pop’s pendulum away from untidy punks. More hits and highlights were supplied by the Eurythmics, Texas, and Wham! – a two-piece boy band headed by a bright young fellow called George Michael.

Meanwhile, a whole new sound was emerging in northwest England. Fusing elements of punk, rock and dance music, the pioneering Joy Division (later evolving into New Order), the Stone Roses and Happy Mondays epitomised the late-’80s/early-’90s Madchester Sound (p566).

Concurrently, the painfully morose but curiously engaging Smiths, fronted by Morrissey (also enjoying a comeback), enjoyed world fame, while on the other side of the Pennines, Leeds-based the Wedding Present championed guitar- and frustration-driven melodies that still influence many bands today.

Dance music and superclubs did their best to dominate the scene but the ’90s also saw the renaissance of British indie bands, with the likes of Blur, Elastica, Suede, Supergrass, Ocean Colour Scene, Manic Street Preachers, the Verve, Pulp, Travis, Feeder, Super Furry Animals, Stereophonics, Catatonia, Radiohead and, above all, Oasis reviving the guitar-based format. Heralded as the ‘Britpop ‘revolution, part of the even bigger Cool Britannia phenomenon that combined new music, new art, new fashion and New Labour politics, it is largely thanks to these bands that the indie guitar sound remains such a major feature of British pop music today

By the cusp of the millennium, Cool Britannia’s shine had predictably faded, but a host of bands such as Coldplay, Franz Ferdinand, Badly Drawn Boy, Snow Patrol and Razorlight played on, and spawned a wave of imitators. Perhaps one of the more successful Britpop survivors was Damon Albarn of Blur, now conquering the charts again with Gorillaz. The Libertines similarly influenced music and fashion, although ex-frontman Pete Doherty is now more famous for drug-and-supermodel scandals than his subsequent band Babyshambles.

As we complete research on this book, halfway through the first decade of the 21st century, British pop and rock have divided into a host of genres mixing a wide range of influences including glam, punk, electronica and folk (while British folk itself, thanks largely to the rise of world music, enjoys its biggest revival since the 1960s). Worth a listen are atmospheric and eclectic British Sea Power, the energetic and nostalgic Go! Team, internet-download heroes Arctic Monkeys and Sandi Thom, plus Belle & Sebastian, the Guillemots, Editors, Kaiser Chiefs, Bloc Party, Interpol, Hard Fi, the Streets, the Zutons, Muse, Kasabian, Embrace, Keane, KT Tunstall, Mylo, Orson, Idlewild, the Delgados, James Yorkston, Seth Lakeman, Jim Moray and King Creosote. For more, see p656 and p666. As we go to press, tips for The Next Big Thing include My Latest Novel, Paolo Nutini, the Fratellis and Biffy Clyro.

The list goes on, and there will no doubt be more exciting names to add by the time you read this. If you get the chance to enjoy Britain’s live-music scene (see Live & Kicking, opposite, as well as the boxed texts on music in the city sections throughout this book), you’ll not only enjoy a good night out, with a bit of luck you’ll also get the chance to feel smug about seeing unknown bands before they achieve world domination.

24 Hour Party People is a totally irreverent, suitably chaotic film about the 1990s Manchester music scene – the Hacienda, Factory Records, Joy Division, Happy Mondays, the lot.

SOUNDS OF SUMMER

If you're a fan of the performing arts, some fine productions are staged outdoors from May to September, in castle grounds (where plays like *Macbeth* at dusk are pure magic) or purpose-built venues such as Regent's Park Theatre (p148) in London and cliff-edge Minack Theatre (p326) in Cornwall. The best known open-air music event is Glyndebourne (p957) – a programme of world-class opera in the spectacular setting of a country-house garden.

Summertime also inspires villages, towns and cities across the country to stage arts and music festivals – everything from small-scale weekend shows to massive spectaculars like the Bath International Music Festival, via specialist events like Buxton Opera Festival, Whitby Folk Festival, Cheltenham Jazz Festival and the Three Choirs Festival (held once every three years at the cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford or Worcester).

And finally there's the open-air long-weekend pop and rock extravaganzas, such as the Big Chill (in the genteel grounds of Eastnor castle), the endearing and increasingly popular Truck (near Abingdon), the colourful Womad global music gathering in Reading, and of course the daddy of them all, Glastonbury (p269). For more festival ideas see our Top Tens on p26 and for more information see p956 or www.efestivals.co.uk.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

The country that gave you the Beatles, Rod Stewart and the Manic Street Preachers is also a hive of classical music, with several professional symphony orchestras, dozens of amateur orchestras, and an active National Association of Youth Orchestras. England, Wales and Scotland each have a national opera company, and the recent multimillion-pound renovation at the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden is bringing in big crowds. Such enthusiasm is all the more remarkable given Britain's small number of well-known classical composers, especially compared with countries like Austria, Germany and Italy.

Key figures include: Henry Purcell, who flourished in the Restoration period but is still regarded as one of the finest English composers; Thomas Arne, best known for the patriotic anthem 'Rule Britannia'; Edward Elgar, famous for his 'Enigma Variations'; Gustav Holst, from Cheltenham, who wrote 'The Planets' (everyone knows the Mars, Bringer of War bit); Ralph Vaughan-Williams, whose London Symphony ends with chimes from Big Ben; and Benjamin Britten, perhaps the finest British composer of the last century, best known for the 'Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra' and the opera *Peter Grimes*. Also of note are Welsh composers William Mathias, Alun Hoddinott and Karl Jenkins; and Scotland's Alexander Campbell Mackenzie and Oliver Knussen.

More recently, the works of Sir Michael Tippett, Peter Maxwell Davies, John Tavener and Harrison Birtwhistle have found international fame, while the music of composer William Lloyd Webber has been brought to public attention by his sons Julian and Andrew.

See www.bbc.co.uk/proms for full details of dates, tickets and when to sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

Best known of all British classical music concert programmes is The Proms (short for 'promenade' – because people used to walk about, or stand, while they listened) – one of the world's greatest music festivals, held from mid-July to mid-September each year at the Royal Albert Hall in London, and widely broadcast on radio and TV.

Architecture

One of the many good reasons to visit Britain is to savour its rich architectural heritage – everything from 5000-year-old Bronze Age burial mounds to the stunning steel-and-glass constructions of the 21st century.

Perhaps the best known construction of prehistoric times is the mysterious stone circle of Stonehenge (p289) – top of the highlight hit list for many visitors – although the Callanish Standing Stones on Scotland's Isle of Lewis are even older. The Scottish islands also hold many of Europe's best surviving remains of Bronze Age and Iron Age times, such as the stone villages of Skara Brae in Orkney and Jarlshof in Shetland.

Other highlights for most visitors are the ramparts of Hadrian's Wall (p632) and the well-preserved Roman swimming pools and saunas that gave the city of Bath its name. Bath is also top of the hit lists for most visitors thanks to architecture from a later time – the 18th- and early 19th-century Georgian period that produced grand houses, squares, parades and the famous Royal Crescent. But if we turn the clock back, it's clear that for much of the past millennium architecture has been dominated by two aspects: worship and defence. This give Britain its incredibly diverse and truly magnificent collection of cathedrals, minsters, abbeys and monasteries dotted across the country, and an equally diverse collection of forts and castles – from evocative ruins such as Helmsley Castle (p546) and Richmond Castle (p523) via the dramatic battlements of castles such as Stirling (p839) in Scotland and Conwy (p737) in Wales, and the finely maintained 'modern' classics like Leeds Castle (p202) and Windsor Castle (p206), to the iconic Tower of London (p142) itself, with walls and moats, battlements and ramparts from every century since the Norman Conquest.

Castles were good for keeping out the enemy, but there were few other benefits of living in a large damp pile of stones, and as times grew more peaceful from around the 16th century, the landed gentry started to build fine residences – known simply as 'country houses'. There was a particular boom in England, Wales and parts of Scotland in the 18th century, and one of the most distinctive features of the British countryside today is the sheer number (not to mention size) of these grand and beautiful structures.

But it's not all about big houses. Alongside the stately homes, ordinary domestic architecture from the 16th century onwards can also still be seen in rural areas: black-and-white 'half-timbered' houses still characterise counties such as Worcestershire, brick-and-flint cottages pepper Suffolk and Sussex, and hardy, centuries-old farms built with slate or local gritstone are a feature of areas such as Derbyshire, north Wales and the Lake District.

In our own era, the rebuilding that followed WWII showed scant regard for the aesthetics of cities, or for the lives of the people who lived in them, as 'back-to-back' terraces of slum houses were demolished and replaced by tower-blocks (simply transposing horizontal rows of deprivation with vertical, according to some critics). Public buildings of the 1960s were often little better; heavy concrete 'brutalism' was much beloved by architects of the time – a style epitomised by London's South Bank Centre, although even this monstrosity has its fans today.

Perhaps the insensitivity of the 1960s and '70s is why, on the whole, the British are conservative in their architectural tastes and often resent ambitious or experimental designs, especially when they're applied to public buildings, or when form appears more important than function. But a familiar pattern often unfolds: after a few years of resentment, first comes a

LISTED BUILDINGS

As you travel around Britain you'll often see churches, castles, great houses, tiny cottages and even 20th-century apartment blocks referred to as 'listed', because they're included on the list of buildings of historic or cultural importance, and therefore protected from development, demolition and so on. There are three main types of listed building: Grade I for the most important, down to Grade III for those of less significance.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Two men have dominated modern British architecture for the last 30 years: Sir Norman Foster and Lord Richard Rogers. Both have designed numerous landmark buildings in Britain, and around the globe – they will each be designing towers to replace the World Trade Centre in New York – although their styles are quite distinct.

Foster favours clean designs with flowing lines. Key works in London include the conical Swiss Re Tower (known universally as the Gherkin), winner of the prestigious Stirling prize, the sensuous Great Court glass roof at the British Museum (p139), and the sinuous Millennium Bridge between St Paul's and the Tate Modern. Other splendid recent examples of his work include the Imperial War Museum North (p560) in Manchester, and the Sage concert hall (p625) in Newcastle-Gateshead.

In contrast, the work of Rogers is technical and intricate. Perhaps his best known work was the Millennium Dome (p151), a tent-like structure with vast curving white fields held aloft by cables and spindly yellow towers. A more recent work is the massive Paddington Basin complex, near the London train station of the same name. Rogers has also worked for Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, on 20,000 new homes.

Meanwhile, Foster's project for Mayor Ken was City Hall (p143; properly known as the Greater London Authority Building), which opened in July 2002. It looks like a tilted beehive, and the glass walls mean you can see everyone inside, hard at work – a deliberate symbol of local-government transparency – while at the top there's the spectacular Londoner's Lounge where you can admire the panoramic views and buy a traditional British cappuccino.

nickname (in London, the bulging cone of the Swiss Re building was dubbed 'the Gherkin', and the near-spherical City Hall was called 'Livingstone's Ball' by some, a reference to London's high-profile mayor), then comes grudging acceptance, and finally comes pride and affection for the new building. The Brits just don't like to be rushed, that's all.

With this attitude in mind, over the last 15 years or so British architecture has started to redeem itself, and many big cities now have contemporary buildings their residents can enjoy and admire. Highlights include Manchester's theatrical Imperial War Museum North (p560), the soaring wood and glass arcs of Sheffield's Winter Gardens (p504), Birmingham's chic new Bullring (p417), The Deep aquarium in Hull (p525), the Welsh National Assembly building, the Senedd (p652), and the Wales Millennium Centre (p650), both on the Cardiff waterfront, the interlocking arches of Glasgow's Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre (p797; already affectionately called 'the armadillo') and the Sage concert hall (p625) of Newcastle-Gateshead.

As well as the grand cathedrals, England has over 12,000 parish churches – many packed with historical or architectural significance. Wales and Scotland have many more.

Painting & Sculpture

For centuries, artists in Britain were influenced by the great European movements, and in the days before cameras, portrait-painting was a reliable if unadventurous mainstay. Top names include Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose portraits in the 'grand style' include *Lady Anstruther* (on view today in London's Tate Britain gallery, p136), and his rival, Thomas Gainsborough, who produced informal works with subjects at ease in a landscape, such as *Mr & Mrs Andrews* (at the National Portrait Gallery, p135).

In the 18th century, William Hogarth was a breakaway figure from the comfortable world of portraits, producing a series of paintings which satirised social abuses. His most celebrated work is *A Rake's Progress,* displayed today at Sir John Soane's Museum (p140), London.

Two other key figures of the 18th-century British art scene were Joseph Wright, whose interest in science inspired the oddly titled but beautifully executed *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump,* and George Stubbs, whose passion for animal anatomy, particularly horses, is evident in many works at Tate Britain, and in countless prints on countless country pub walls.

Gainsborough's landscape tradition was continued by John Constable, who painted mainly in Suffolk (still billed as 'Constable Country' by the local tourist board). His most famous work is *The Haywain* (National Gallery, p134) – an idyllic rural scene.

Constable's contemporaries include poet, painter and visionary William Blake, and JMW Turner, whose works increasingly subordinated picture details to the effects of light and colour. By the 1840s, Turner's compositions became almost entirely abstract and were widely vilified. Both artists have rooms dedicated to their work at Tate Britain.

In 1848 Sir John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which combined the simplicity of early Italian art with a closely observed realism. Millais' *Ophelia,* showing the damsel picturesquely drowned in a pool, is an excellent example of their style, and can be seen at the Tate Britain gallery. However, one of the best collections of Pre-Raphaelite art is in the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (p411). A good friend of the Pre-Raphaelites was William Morris; he saw late-19th-century furniture and interior design as increasingly vulgar, and with Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones founded the Arts and Crafts movement. This movement encouraged the revival of a decorative approach to features such as wallpaper, tapestries and windows. Many of his designs are still used today.

'George Stubbs' passion for animal anatomy is evident in many works at Tate Britain, and in countless prints on countless country pub walls.'

North of the border, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, fresh from the Glasgow School of Art, fast became a renowned artist, designer and architect. He is still Scotland's greatest Art Nouveau exponent, and much of his work remains in this city (see p789 for more details). Mackintosh influenced a group of artists from the 1890s called the Glasgow Boys, among them James Guthrie and EA Walton, who were also much taken with French impressionism. Perhaps inevitably, another group of decorative artists and designers emerged called the Glasgow Girls.

In the 20th century, the place of British art in the international arena was ensured by Henry Moore's and Barbara Hepworth's monumental sculptures, Francis Bacon's contorted paintings, David Hockney's highly representational images of – among other things – dachshunds and swimming pools, and the works of a group known as the Scottish Colourists – Francis Cadell, SJ Peploe, Leslie Hunter and JD Ferguson. Much of Hockney's work can be seen at Salt's Mill gallery (p514) in Bradford (his hometown); some of Moore's work can be seen at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (p514), between Sheffield and Leeds; Hepworth is forever associated with St Ives in Cornwall (p328); while the colourist seascapes of Peploe and Cadell have been turned into the type of prints and postcards eternally favoured by Scottish souvenir shops.

Paul Nash, an official war artist in WWI and WWII, and Graham Sutherland, Nash's counterpart in WWII, followed in the Romantic and visionary tradition of Blake and Turner. Between the wars, Welsh sister-and-brother artists Gwen and Augustus John flourished; Gwen John painted gentle, introspective portraits of women friends, cats and nuns – and famously became the model and lover of French artist August Rodin. Augustus was Britain's leading portrait painter, with such famous sitters as Thomas Hardy and George Bernard Shaw. One place to admire works by the Johns is the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery (p668) in Swansea.

The Scottish Colourists were followed in the interwar years by a group known as the Edinburgh School. This group included William MacTaggart, who was much influenced by the French expressionists and went on to become one of Scotland's best known painters. His rich and colourful landscapes can be seen in the National Gallery, and in the Hunterian Art Gallery (p788) in Glasgow.

After WWII, Howard Hodgkin and Patrick Heron developed a British version of American abstract expressionism. At the same time, but in great contrast, Manchester artist LS Lowry was painting his much-loved 'matchstick men' figures set in an urban landscape of narrow streets and smoky factories. A good place to see his work is in the Lowry centre (p561), Manchester.

In 1956 a young artist called Richard Hamilton created a photomontage called *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* as a poster for the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. It launched the pop-art movement in Britain, and the style was loved by millions when Peter Blake designed the record cover for the Beatles' seminal album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This influenced Scottish artists Alan Davie and Sir Eduardo Paolozzi, who became leading figures in the world of pop art and abstract expressionism. Their works can be seen in Edinburgh's Dean Gallery.

The Whitechapel Art Gallery also helped launch the career of sculptor Anthony Caro, with a ground-breaking exhibition in 1963. Creating large abstract works primarily in steel and bronze, Caro has become a highly influential figure, considered by many to be Britain's greatest living sculptor. For more heavy metal see www.anthonycaro.org.

Moving towards our own era, the British art scene of the 1990s was dominated by a group of young artists championed by advertising tycoon Charles Saatchi, and displayed at his eponymous gallery (www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk). As 'Britpop' developed in the music industry, so the paintings, sculptures and installations of these artists became known as 'Britart'. As notorious as they were talented – some would say more of the former, less of the latter – the group included Damien Hirst, infamous for his use of animals, alive and dead, Tracey Emin, most famous for *My Bed,* a combination of soiled sheets and 'sluttish detritus' (according to one review), and Rachel Whiteread, initially best known for her resin casts of commonplace objects.

The early years of the 21st century have, inevitably, been dubbed the 'post-Britart' era. A body of less obviously shocking artists is emerging, although none has become a household name yet – not even Simon Starling, winner of the 2005 Turner Prize. Of the previous generation, Whiteread is still a major figure on the art scene today: in 2006 she created a massive labyrinthine installation called *Embankment* for the equally gigantic Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern (p144) in London, a fitting work for one of the world's most impressive galleries. For more see www.tate.org.uk.

Other key artists of today include the sculptor Antony Gormley, whose *Angel of the North* overlooks the city of Gateshead near Newcastle. A massive steel construction of a human figure with outstretched wings, more fitting on a 747 than a heavenly being, it was initially derided by the locals, but it is now an instantly recognised symbol of northeast England.

The *Angel of the North* is one of the most viewed works of art in the world. It stands beside the busy A1 highway and millions of drivers each year can't help but see this huge sculpture. See www.gateshead.gov.uk/angel.

Theatre

However you budget your time and money, make sure that you see some British theatre as part of your travels. It easily lives up to its reputation as the finest in the world. The Edinburgh Festival is globally renowned (even though Glasgow is the heart of Scottish theatre), Cardiff has a new top-class venue, and London's West End is the international centre for theatrical arts – whatever New Yorkers say.

But first, let's set the stage with some history. Britain's best known theatrical name is of course William Shakespeare, whose plays were first performed in the 16th century at the Globe Theatre. His brilliant plots and sharp prose, and the sheer size of his canon of work (including classics such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*), have turned him into a national icon (see p422). The Globe has now been rebuilt (see p144), so you can see the Bard's plays performed in Elizabethan style – in the round, with 'groundlings' in the audience heckling the actors and joining in the bits they know.

England's first theatre was built in 1576 on the northern outskirts of London and was called – rather unimaginatively – 'The Theatre'. Shakespeare's famous Globe Theatre came a little later.

Britain's theatres were firmly closed as dens of iniquity in Oliver Cromwell's day, but when Charles II returned from exile in 1660 he opened the doors again, and encouraged radical practices such as actresses (female roles had previously been played by boys) – an innovation loved by London audiences, along with humorous plays known as Restoration comedies, delighting in bawdy wordplay and mockery of the upper classes. The leading lady of the day was Nell Gwyn, who also became Charles II's mistress.

In the 18th century, theatres were built in the larger British cities. The Bristol Old Vic and The Grand in Lancaster date from this time, along with plays such as Oliver Goldsmith's uproarious *She Stoops to Conquer*. Top of the bill was actor David Garrick, who later gave his name to one of London's leading theatres.

The innovation of gas lighting at London's Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres set the 19th-century stage for some wonderful shows, including the brilliant comedies of Oscar Wilde (everyone's heard of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* even if they haven't seen it). And the quality continued into the 20th century, with the 1950s a particularly rich era, when Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft were at their professional peak.

Harold Pinter wrote numerous plays but is probably still best known for his landmark work *The Birthday Party* – a study of sinister figures and shady untold pasts.

The 1950s also marked the emergence of new playwrights with new freedoms, such as John Osborne, whose best known work is *Look Back in Anger*. A contemporary was Harold Pinter, who developed a new dramatic style and perfectly captured the stuttering illogical diction of real-life conversation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, plays by Tom Stoppard *(Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead),* Peter Shaffer *(Amadeus),* Michael Frayn *(Noises Off)* and Alan Ayckbourn *(The Norman Conquests)* took the country by storm – and famous British actors such as Helen Mirren, Glenda Jackson, Judi Dench and Tom Courtenay did justice to them on stage.

In the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, big names in British theatre include Brenda Blethyn, Charles Dance, Judi Dench (still!), Ian McKellen, Anthony Sher, Simon Callow, Toby Stephens, Jane Horrocks, Ewan McGregor, Rhys Ifans and Ralph Fiennes – although most perform in stage productions only once or twice a year, combining this with more lucrative appearances on the small or silver screen.

Look Back in Anger launched the career of playwright John Osborne and actor Alan Bates, with rebellious lead character Jimmy Porter perfectly capturing the spirit of an unhappy and frustrated postwar generation.

In London, other stars of the stage these days are the directors, especially Nicholas Hytner at the National Theatre, whose 2006 successes included *The History Boys* by the perennially dour playwright Alan Bennett. After winning numerous accolades in Britain, the play transferred to Broadway – where it charmed the notoriously tough New York critics and eventually scooped six Tony awards (the most for any production since Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in 1949). Another hit of 2006 was *Rock 'n' Roll,* a multi-themed play by Tom Stoppard about the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, directed by award-winning Trevor Nunn at London's Royal Court Theatre. As the title suggests, rock music also features in the play, and Mick Jagger has reportedly already bought the film rights.

It's thanks to the quality and success of British drama that native actors are frequently joined by colleagues from across the pond, as the likes of Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, Matthew Perry, Macaulay Culkin, Christian Slater, Kim Cattrall, Gael Garcia Bernal, David Schwimmer and Kevin Spacey have performed in London productions in recent years, exchanging Hollywood glamour for pay-cuts and the genuine cred that only treading

IT'S ALL A BIT OF A PANTOMIME

If any British tradition seems specially designed to bemuse outsiders, it has to be pantomime, performed in theatres all over the country, usually in January and February. Essentially a pantomime is a comedy play or review, with dialogue, routines, songs, dances and lots of custard-pie humour (and – despite the name – no mime) loosely based on stories such as *Cinderella* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

Pantomime's roots go back to Celtic legends, medieval morality plays and the art of mumming, but the modern version is a post-Christmas ritual, with people packing out theatres to see old favourite 'pantos' updated to touch on recent political scandals or celebrity gossip, and always featuring a star from a TV soap or game-show, or from the world of pop or sport. Pantos also feature routines that everyone knows and joins in ('Where's that dragon/wizard/pirate/lion?' – 'He's behind you!') and tradition dictates that the leading 'boy' is played by a woman, and the leading lady, or 'dame', played by a man. It may be bizarre, but for kids and families it's a great evening out. Oh no, it isn't. Oh yes, it is. Oh no, it isn't.

West End boards can bestow. (For more cues on the capital's current drama scene see p171.)

And while there's often an urge among producers to stick with the big names and safe (and profitable) productions, the risk and innovation normally more associated with fringe events does sometimes filter through too, making London's theatre arguably more innovative and exciting than it's been since the Restoration, and certainly – according to some critics – since the angry postwar era of Osborne and company. Only London could produce an entirely new genre by turning a TV talk-show for losers, misfits, weirdos and gender-benders into the wonderfully perverse, and highly controversial, *Jerry Springer – the Opera*.

A London tradition is the 'long run' – plays that are performed season after season. The record holder is *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie; the play has been running at London's St Martin's Theatre for more than 50 years.

Alongside the frivolity, perhaps the most notable, and possibly most predictable, trend in recent times has been the upsurge in political theatre in the wake of the Iraq war. The satire and analysis spread all the way from the fringe – where plays such as *Justifying War, The Madness of George Dubya* and *A Weapons Inspector Calls* were on show – to the West End, where political drama *Guantanamo* deeply moved and impressed audiences, although it has to be said that in many cases there was an element of preaching to the converted.

Despite the vital message of *Guantanamo* and *Jerry*'s much-deserved success, for many visitors to London the theatres of the West End mean one thing: musicals, from *Jesus Christ Superstar* in the 1970s, to *Bollywood Dreams* and *The Woman in White* in 2006, via *Cats, Les Mis, Chicago, Phantom* and all the rest. Many of today's shows are based on the pop lexicon, with singalongs from *Mamma Mia* to *Fame,* proving that – just like in Shakespeare's day – all we want to do really is join in.

Outdoor Activities

What's the best way to get off the beaten track as you travel around Britain? Simple: enjoy some outdoor activity. Fresh air is good for your body and soul, of course, and becoming *actively* involved in the country's way of life is much more rewarding than staring at it through a camera lens or car window.

Walking and cycling are the most popular and accessible of all outdoor activities, and open up some beautiful corners of the country. You can enjoy short rambles or long tours, conquer mountains or cruise across plains. There's something for young and old, and these activities are often perfect for families. Whatever your budget, it's a wonderful opportunity to get out and explore, and a walk or ride through the British countryside could be a highlight of your trip.

The first stop for outdoor fans should be www.visitbritain.com – then follow links to Holiday Ideas and Outdoor Activities for details about walking and cycling routes, maps and tours, plus walking and cycling festivals around the country.

Information

Throughout this book, the start of each regional chapter gives an overview of the best opportunities for outdoor activities in that area. For more ideas and inspiration, your first stop should always be a tourist office, where you can pick up free leaflets on local walks and rides, or places to climb, fish, surf, ride or play golf in the surrounding region. Tourist-office staff can also tell you where to hire bikes or surf gear, find local guided walks or riding stables, or join organised groups for activities such as caving. For walkers and cyclists, tourist offices also sell booklets (for a nominal fee), plus detailed guidebooks and maps (around £4 to £8) describing everything from half-hour strolls to week-long expeditions. In rural areas, books and maps are also available in local newsagents and outdoor-gear shops.

The list of activities following starts with walking and cycling – stuff you can do virtually on a whim – then covers other activities that are a bit more structured or need some advance preparation.

www.walkingworld.com offers downloadable maps and descriptions of thousands of routes around Britain, plus other services for walkers.

WALKING

Perhaps because Britain is such a crowded place, open areas are highly valued, and every weekend millions of British people get their boots on and take to the countryside. You could do a lot worse than join them!

Every village and town is surrounded by a web of footpaths, while most patches of open country are crossed by paths and tracks, so the options are limitless. You can walk from place to place in true backpacking style, or base yourself in an interesting spot for a week or so and go out on day-walks to explore the surrounding countryside.

Access & Rules

The joy of walking in Britain is due in no small part to the 'right of way' network – public paths and tracks across private property. Nearly all land in Britain (including in national parks) is privately owned, but if there's a right of way, you can follow it through fields, woods, even farmhouse yards, as long as you keep to the route and do no damage.

The main types of rights of way for walkers are footpaths and bridleways (the latter open to horse riders and mountain bikers too). You'll also see 'byways', which due to a quirk of history are open to *all* traffic, so don't be surprised if you have to wade through mud churned up by chunky tyres, or if you're disturbed by the antics of off-road driving fanatics as you're quietly strolling along enjoying the countryside.

Britain's right-of-way network has existed for centuries (some paths literally for millennia), so single trails slicing through the wilderness, as found in Australia or the USA, simply don't exist here. Even famous long-distance routes such as the Coast to Coast simply link many shorter paths.

Thanks to the landmark Countryside Act of 2004, walkers (not bikes and other vehicles) in England and Wales can now move freely *beyond* rights of way in some mountain and moorland areas – but not in enclosed fields or cultivated areas. Where this is permitted, it's clearly shown on maps and by 'Access Land' or 'Open Access' notices on gates and signposts. The land is still privately owned, and occasionally Access Land is closed, for example if wild birds are nesting, or if the farmer is rounding up sheep, but the so-called 'right to roam' or 'freedom to roam' legislation opens up thousands of square miles of landscape previously off limits to walkers – a milestone ruling resulting from more than 70 years of campaigning by the Ramblers Association and other groups. For more information see www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk.

Scotland has a different legal system to England and Wales, with fewer rights of way, but has a tradition of relatively free access in mountain and moorland areas (although there are restrictions during the grouse- and deer-hunting seasons).

The website of the Ramblers' Association (☎ 020-7339 8500; www.ramblers.org.uk), the country's leading walking organisation, has comprehensive information on routes, areas and services.

Where to Walk

Here's a quick rundown of some great British walking areas, with everything to tempt you, from gentle hills to high summits, whether you're a casual rambler or an energetic peak-bagger. With a map and a sense of adventure, the rest is up to you!

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Within striking distance of London are the South Downs (p183) and the coast of Norfolk (p479), but the emptiest, highest and wildest area in southern England is Dartmoor (p311), where the rounded hills are dotted with granite outcrops called 'tors' – looking for all the world like abstract sculptures.

Also in the southwest, Exmoor (p271) has grassy, heather-covered hills cut by deep valleys and edged by spectacular cliffs, great beaches, quiet villages and busy seaside resorts.

In the deep south lies the New Forest. Visitors to Britain love this name, as the area is more than 1000 years old and there aren't *that* many trees – it's mainly conifer plantation and great open areas of gorse and heath. But apart from these minor details, it's a wonderful place for easy strolls.

And just over the water is the Isle of Wight (p222). If you're new to walking in Britain, or simply not looking for high peaks and wilderness, this is a good first choice. The local authorities have put a lot of effort into footpaths and signposted routes; most are linear and can be done in a day, and you can always get back to your starting point using the island's excellent bus service.

CENTRAL ENGLAND

The gem of central England is the Cotswold Hills (p356). This is classic English countryside, with gentle paths through neat fields and mature woodland, or pretty villages with churches, farms and cottages of honey-coloured stone.

NORTHERN ENGLAND

In the northwest of the country, the Lake District (p590) is the heart and soul of walking in England – a wonderful area of soaring peaks, endless views, deep valleys and, of course, beautiful lakes. There's a great selection of country hotels, B&Bs and camp sites too.

Further north, keen walkers love the starkly beautiful hills of Northumberland National Park (p641), while the nearby coast is less daunting but just as dramatic.

For something a little gentler, the valleys and rolling hills of the Yorkshire Dales (p518) makes it one of the most popular walking areas in England.

SOUTH & MID WALES

The Brecon Beacons (p696) is a large group of mountains, forming a natural border between the central and southern parts of Wales. You won't find pointy peaks here; this is a range of gigantic rolling whalebacks, with broad ridges and table-top summits, cut by deep valleys.

Out in the wild west of Wales is Pembrokeshire (p677), a gem of an area, with one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in Britain – a wonderful array of beaches, cliffs, rock arches, stacks, buttresses, islands, coves and harbours. You have to go to Cornwall to get anything like this and to northwest Scotland for anything better. The relatively mild climate means you can walk here year-round, although the coast gets hammered by some spectacular gales, especially in winter.

NORTH WALES

For walkers, North Wales is Snowdonia (p721), where the remains of ancient, eroded volcanoes bequeath a striking landscape of jagged peaks, sharp ridges and steep cliffs. There are challenging walks on Mt Snowdon itself – at 1085m, the highest peak in England and Wales – and many more on the surrounding Glyders or Carneddau ranges.

The Ramblers' Association's *Walk Britain* is an invaluable annual publication, outlining routes and walking areas, with handy lists of walker-friendly B&Bs and hostels all over Britain.

SOUTHERN & CENTRAL SCOTLAND

This extensive region embraces several areas just perfect for keen walkers, including Ben Lomond, the best-known peak in the area, and the nearby Trossachs range, now within the new Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (p825). Also in this area is the splendid Isle of Arran (p817) – 'Scotland in miniature' – with a great choice of coastal rambles and high-mountain hikes.

NORTH & WEST SCOTLAND

Another large and truly excellent walking area, where complex geology and the forces of nature have created scenery that really lives up to the postcard images. Here you'll find two of Scotland's most famous place names, Glen Coe (p887) and Ben Nevis (p885), Britain's highest mountain at 1343m, while off the west coast lies the dramatic mountains of the Isle of Skye (p907).

Keep going north and west, and things just keep getting better. For serious and experienced mountain walkers, Scotland's northwest Highlands region is sheer paradise: a remote and beautiful area, sparsely populated, with scenic glens and lochs, and some of the largest, wildest and finest mountains in Britain.

Many long-distance routes are served by baggage-carrying services, ideal if you don't want to lug heavy gear. For about £5 to £10 per day, your bags will be delivered to your next B&B by dedicated van or local taxi. See www.carrylite.com, www.cumbria.com/packhorse, www.pikedaw.freeserve.co.uk/walks or www.sherpavan.com.

Long-Distance Walks

Many walkers savour the chance of completing one of Britain's famous long-distance routes. There are over 500 walks in all, including around 20 official National Trails (in England and Wales) or Long Distance Routes (in Scotland) with better signposting and maintenance than many other long routes, making them ideal for beginners or visitors. Other long walks such as the Dales Way are not national trails, but are just as popular. You don't have to follow these routes end-to-end; you can walk just a section for a day or two, or use the route as a basis for loops exploring the surrounding area. Here's a short list of our favourites to get you started:

Coast to Coast Walk The number-one favourite. A top-quality hike across northern England, through three national parks and spectacular scenery of valleys, plains, mountains, dales and moors; 190 miles. See p501.

Cotswold Way A fascinating walk through classic picture-postcard countryside with smatterings of English history; 102 miles. See p356.

Cumbria Way A fine hike through Lake District valleys, with breathtaking mountain views; 68 miles.

THERE'S COLD IN THEM THERE HILLS

The British countryside can appear gentle and welcoming, and often is, but sometimes the weather can turn nasty. If you're walking on the high hills or open moors, at any time of year, it's vital to be well equipped. You should carry warm and waterproof clothing (even in summer), good maps and a compass, some drink, food and high-energy stuff like chocolate. If you're really going off the beaten track, leave details of your route with someone. Sounds a bit extreme, but carrying a whistle and torch – in case of an emergency – is no bad thing either.

Dales Way A great walk through the farmland and valleys of the Yorkshire Dales, leading into the Lake District; 84 miles. See p519.
Glyndŵr's Way A long loop through the beautiful and remote rolling hills of Mid Wales, the land of 15th-century Welsh freedom fighter Owain Glyndŵr; 132 miles. See p705.
Great Glen Way A nonarduous route along the geological fault that splits Scotland, including a section beside famous Loch Ness; 73 miles. See p884.
Hadrian's Wall Path In the footsteps of the legions, an epic stride across northern England; 84 miles. See p633.
Offa's Dyke Path A historical hike along the ancient defensive ditch marking the border between England and Wales, through a tremendous range of scenery; 177 miles. See p663.
Pembrokeshire Coast Path An awe-inspiring walk along one of the finest coastlines in Britain, and best-loved long route in Wales; 186 miles. See p677.
Pennine Way The granddaddy of them all, along the mountainous spine of northern England; 256 miles. See p446.
South West Coast Path A roller-coaster romp round the southwest tip of England, past beaches, bays, shipwrecks, seaside resorts, fishing villages and clifftop castles; 610 miles. See p244.
Southern Upland Way Striding through the heart of Scotland's Southern Uplands, an extremely remote and challenging route, with some very long daily sections; 212 miles. See p783.
Speyside Way Billed as a walk that 'captures the spirit of Scotland', this scenic riverside route links the Cairngorm foothills to the sea – and passes several whisky distilleries; 84 miles. See p824.
Thames Path A journey of contrasts beside England's best-known river, from rural Gloucestershire to the heart of London; 173 miles. See p343.
West Highland Way Scotland's – and Britain's – most popular long-distance path, leading walkers from the outskirts of Glasgow to Fort William in the highlands, past mountains, lochs and fast-flowing rivers; 95 miles. See p824.

For comprehensive coverage of a selection of walking routes and areas, we (naturally) recommend Lonely Planet's *Walking in Britain,* also covering places to stay and eat along long-distance walks and in popular walking areas, plus detailed information on what to take and what to see along the way.

For details on national trail options in England and Wales stroll over to www.nationaltrail.co.uk. For long-distance routes in Scotland see www.snh.org.uk. Some of the best guidebooks to individual national trails are produced by Trailblazer (www.trailblazer-guides.com) and Cicerone (www.cicerone.co.uk). For more information on other long walks in Britain see www.ramblers.org.uk.

Cyclists' Touring Club (☎ 0870 873 0060; www.ctc.org.uk) is the UK's leading recreational cycling and campaigning body. The website lists suggested routes, local contacts, cyclist-friendly accommodation and organised holidays, plus a cycle-hire directory and mail-order service for maps and books.

CYCLING

A bike is the perfect transport for exploring back-road Britain. Once you escape the busy main highways, a vast network of quiet country lanes leads through fields and peaceful villages, ideal for touring on a road bike or mountain bike. Off-road riders can go further into the wilds on the many tracks and bridleways that cross Britain's farmlands, forests and high moors.

The opportunities are endless. Depending on your energy and enthusiasm you can amble along flat lanes, taking it easy and stopping for cream teas, or thrash all day through hilly areas, revelling in steep ascents and swooping downhill sections. You can cycle from place to place, camping or staying in B&Bs (many are cyclist-friendly), or you can base yourself in one place for a few days and go out on rides in different directions.

Access & Rules

Bikes aren't allowed on motorways, but you can cycle on all other public roads, although main roads (A-roads) tend to be busy and should be avoided. Many B-roads suffer heavy motor traffic too, so the best places for cycling are the small C-roads and unclassified roads ('lanes') that cover rural Britain, especially in lowland areas, meandering through quiet countryside and linking picturesque villages.

Cycling is *not* allowed on footpaths, but mountain bikers can ride on unmade roads or bridleways that are a public right of way. For mountain biking it's often worth seeking out forestry areas; among the vast plantations, signposted routes of varying difficulty have been opened up for single-track fans.

For transporting bikes on trains, see p973.

Cycling in the UK is an excellent handbook, coving more than 40 day-rides and a range of longer 'holiday routes'. For off-roading, the best book is *Where to Mountain Bike in Britain,* or see www.wheretomtb.com.

Where to Cycle

While you can cycle anywhere in Britain, some places are better than others. In popular spots, car traffic can be a problem on summer weekends, and if you're not a regular cyclist, the hills in some areas can be daunting. This section gives a brief overview, but (just as with walking) all you need is a map and a sense of adventure, and the highways and byways of Britain are yours for the taking.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Down at the southwest tip of the country, Cornwall and Devon are beautiful, and enjoy the best of the English climate, but the rugged landscape makes for tough days in the saddle. Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire have more gentle hills (plus a few steep valleys to keep you on your toes) and a beautiful network of quiet lanes, making them perfect for leisurely cycle touring. In Hampshire, the ancient woodland and open heath of the New Forest (p219) is especially good for on-road and off-road rides, while in Sussex the South Downs have numerous mountain-bike options.

The Cyclists Touring Club is the oldest cycling organisation in Britain. It was founded in 1878, when the bike of choice was the penny-farthing, and the national scandal of the day was 'lady bicyclists' wearing trousers.

EASTERN ENGLAND

The counties of Norfolk and Suffolk (see p458) are generally low-lying and flat, with quiet lanes winding through farmland and picturesque villages, past rivers, lakes and welcoming country pubs – great for easy pedalling.

CENTRAL ENGLAND

The Cotswolds (p356) offer good cycling options, with lanes through farmland and quaint villages. From the western side of the hills you get fantastic views over the Severn Valley, but you wouldn't want to go up and down this escarpment too often! The Marches area (p382), where England borders Wales, is another rural delight, with good quiet lanes and some off-road options in the hills.

SUPERIOR RACE

This section covers touring by bike, but Britain also boasts an active cycle-racing scene, especially enhanced in July 2007 with the start of the Tour de France in London. Super-human riders in the world's biggest bike race (and the world's biggest annual sporting event) already take in Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Germany (plus France, of course) and now add Britain to the three-week 2200-mile loop. Mere mortals looking for something in between touring and racing should check out Britain's programme of challenge rides. For details see www.britishcycling.org.uk, www.tourdefrancelondon.com, www.ctc.org.uk and www.audax.uk.net

THE NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

Anyone riding a bike through Britain will almost certainly come across the National Cycle Network, a UK-wide 10,000-mile web of roads and traffic-free tracks. Strands of the network in busy cities are aimed at commuters or school kids (where the network follows city streets, cyclists normally have their own lane, separate from motor traffic), while other sections follow the most remote roads in the country, and are perfect for touring.

The whole scheme is the brainchild of Sustrans (derived from 'sustainable transport'), a campaign group barely taken seriously way back in 1978 when the network idea was first announced. But the growth of cycling, coupled with near-terminal car congestion, has earned the scheme lots of attention – not to mention many millions of pounds from national government and regional authorities.

Several long-distance touring routes use the most scenic sections of the National Cycle Network and, it has to be said, a few less-than-scenic urban sections. Other features include a great selection of artworks to admire along the way. In fact, the network is billed as the country's largest outdoor sculpture gallery. The whole scheme is a resounding success and a credit to the visionaries who persevered against inertia all those years ago. For more details see www.sustrans.org.uk.

NORTHERN ENGLAND

It's no accident that many of England's top racing cyclists come from northern England – the mountain roads make an excellent training ground. The North York Moors (p545) offer exhilarating off-road rides, while the Yorkshire Dales (p518) is great for cycle touring. These areas are hilly and some routes can be strenuous, but the scenery is superb and it's all well worth the effort.

Derbyshire's Peak District (p446) is a very popular area for mountain biking and road cycling, although the hills are also quite steep in places. More leisurely options are excellent cycle routes cutting through the landscape along disused railways – dramatic and effortless at the same time.

WALES

The varied Welsh landscape, crossed by a wonderful network of lanes and forest tracks, makes an excellent place to cycle, although much of it is hilly so low gears will often be the order of the day.

In the north, the rugged peaks of Snowdonia (p721) provide a dramatic backdrop to any cycling trip, although some ascents can be stiff. An easier option is the nearby Isle of Anglesey (p741).

Mid Wales offers quiet cycling in a scenic and surprisingly little-visited region, while the area around Brecon Beacons (p695) is popular for tourists and off-roaders. Finally, out to the west, lovely Pembrokeshire (p676) is also excellent on a bike – although the hills go all the way to the sea!

Anyone planning a cycle tour in Britain should check out Sustrans (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.sustrans.org.uk); as well as providing general information, cycling tips and useful contacts, it has a shop area (also available as a printed catalogue) with a huge range of dedicated cycling maps and guidebooks. Also worth checking is www.thenationalbyway.org.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Borders (p801) is an excellent area for touring by bike. It offers a combination of rolling farmland, lochs, glens and hills, all easily accessible, with a peaceful, intimate charm. For off-road fans, there's a fantastic range of specially constructed routes in the Galloway Forest Park in Dumfries and Galloway, and several other sites across the southern part of the country. See www.7stanes.gov.uk for more details.

Cyclists in search of the wild and remote will love the Highlands (p878). There are not many roads, but traffic is usually light. As you pass majestic mountains, beautiful lochs and coasts with views of mystical islands, it won't just be the pedalling that takes your breath away.

If you really want to get away from traffic, head for the islands. Ferries (which carry bikes) go from the mainland to the Western Isles (p824) – wonderful getaway options for two-wheeled travel.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Coasteering

If a simple walk along the clifftops admiring the view just doesn't cut the mustard, and you'd like to combine elements of rock climbing with the element of water, then the wacky activity of coasteering might appeal. It's like mountaineering, although instead of going up a mountain, you go along the coast – a steep rocky coast, often with waves breaking around your feet. And if the rock gets too steep, you jump in and start swimming. You need a wetsuit, an old pair of shoes, buoyancy aid, helmet – and a sense of adventure. The birthplace (and best place) for coasteering is Pembrokeshire (p677), although Cornwall and Devon are gaining popularity. It's not something you should go off and do on your own; ask at tourist offices about specialist local operators.

Fishing

Fishing is enormously popular in Britain, but in many areas it's highly regulated, with prime stretches of river privately owned and angling rights fiercely protected. There's a fishing club on the idyllic trout-filled River Itchen in Hampshire, where it's rumoured even Prince Charles had to join the waiting list.

Fly fishers in Britain mainly catch salmon, brown trout and rainbow trout, while coarse fishing is principally for perch, carp, bream and the occasional oversized pike. There are plenty of well-stocked rivers and reservoirs, as well as stretches of wild waterway, but wherever you fish in England and Wales, you'll need to obtain a licence – available from post offices (from £3 per day to £60 for the season) or from the website of the **Environment Agency** (www.environment-agency.gov.uk).

The fishing-licence situation in Scotland is more complicated, as you may need separate permits for different rivers. They can be very costly. For more details, check the website of the **Scottish Federation for Coarse Angling** (www.sfca.co.uk).

If you want to try your luck, tourist-office staff can direct you to local clubs or places offering a day or two's fishing, such as stocked reservoirs that allow public access or smart hotels with private lakes or stretches of river.

On the sea, it's a different story. At resort-towns around the coast of Britain, you can easily find skippered boats offering angling trips, usually with tackle, bait (and lunch) included in the fee. Details are given in the individual town sections.

'Britain, and particularly Scotland, is the home of golf, with around 500 private and public golf courses in Scotland alone.'

Golf

Britain, and particularly Scotland, is the home of golf, with around 2000 private and public golf courses in Britain, and 500 in Scotland alone. There are, in fact, more golf courses per capita in Scotland than any other country in the world.

Golf courses fall into two main categories: private and public. Some exclusive private clubs admit only golfers who have a handicap certificate from their own club, but most welcome visitors. Public courses run by town or city councils are open to anyone.

A round on a public course will cost around £10 (more at weekends). Private courses average around £40. Top-end hotels may have arrangements with nearby courses, which get you reduced fees or guaranteed tee-off times. If you need to hire, a set of golf clubs costs from £10 per round.

A very good starting point for golfers from overseas is the **Golf Club of Great Britain** (☎ 020-8390 3113; www.golfclubgb.co.uk); this friendly organisation can advise on where to play and arranges regular tournaments. For serious information, the **English Golf Union** (☎ 01526-354500; www.englishgolfunion.org) can, among other things, provide a list of affiliated clubs. The **Welsh Golfing Union** (☎ 01633-430830; www.welshgolf.org) is similar. The **Scottish Golf Union** (☎ 01382-549500; www.scottishgolf.com) is much more useful as it also has lots of detail aimed specifically at visitors.

Horse Riding & Pony Trekking

There's a theory that humans are genetically programmed to absorb the world at a horse's walking pace. It's all to do with our nomadic ancestors, apparently. Add the extra height, and seeing Britain from horseback is a highly recommended way to go.

Across Britain, especially in rural areas and national parks such as Dartmoor and Northumberland, the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales, and the Galloway Hills in Scotland, riding centres cater to all levels of proficiency. Generally, pony trekking is aimed at novice riders. If you're more experienced in equestrian matters, most centres have horses available.

Many riding centres advertise in national-park newspapers (available free from hotels, tourist offices and local shops). A half-day pony trek costs around £15, a full day £20 to £30. Serious riders pay higher rates for superior mounts. The website of the **British Horse Society** (☎ 0870 120 2244; www.bhs.org.uk) lists approved riding centres and – if you fancy a few days in the saddle – outfits offering riding holidays.

Kitesurfing

If regular surfing just doesn't offer enough airtime, here's an easy solution: strap yourself to a board and an enormous parachute (technically a parafoil), and let the wind do the work. It's called kitesurfing, and combines elements of windsurfing, wakeboarding, surfing and kite-flying. It's also one of the fastest-growing water sports in the world. Brisk winds, decent waves and great beaches make Cornwall and Pembrokeshire favourite spots, but it's possible on other beaches along the British coastline. There are several schools which can show you the ropes. Contact the **British Kite Surfing Association** (☎ 01509-856500; www.kitesurfing.org) for more information.

> **'If regular surfing just doesn't offer enough airtime, here's an easy solution: strap yourself to a board and an enormous parachute and let the wind do the work.'**

Kiteboarding & Kite Buggying

If you like the idea of kites but don't fancy getting wet, you can experience wind-fuelled thrills on dry land too. Instead of balancing on a surfboard, you can pick up serious speed standing on an oversized skateboard or sitting on a specially-built kite buggy. The latter option, also known as para-karting, is similar to land yachting, but with a parafoil instead of a sail. Both activities are usually available on beaches where surfers lurk, and any other big stretch of flat sand, notably Pembrey in Carmarthenshire and Burnham Deepdale in Norfolk, a great backpacker-friendly base for other activities too.

Mountainboarding

Imagine hurtling down a rough grassy hillside at horrendous speeds on a gigantic skateboard equipped with four oversized wheels, and you've pretty much got mountainboarding. This exhilarating activity combines elements of surfing, snowboarding and mountain biking, and is rapidly picking up momentum across the country since it's relatively simple to get started – all you really need is a board, a few hills and some sympathetic friends who can drive you to hospital once your ride is over. There are mountainboarding centres in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Shropshire and Cornwall, in the Brecon Beacons (p696) in Wales and near Helensburgh in Scotland (among other places), but you can do it practically anywhere there's a grassy slope – as long as you've got the landowner's permission of course. For more information see www.atbauk.org

SCRAMBLING

Scrambling seems to be another outdoor activity invented in Britain – covering the twilight zone between serious hiking and rock climbing. Scrambling definitely involves using your hands, as well as your feet – and often involves a little rush of adrenaline now and again too. While experienced climbers may cruise effortlessly up a scramble, someone new to the game may need a rope and a lot of encouragement. Classic scrambles in Britain include Bristly Ridge and Crib Coch in Snowdonia, Jack's Rake and Striding Edge in the Lake District, and the Aonach Eagach Ridge in Glen Coe. Local guidebooks can suggest many more. It's great fun, as long as you know what you're doing.

Rock Climbing & Mountaineering

Britain is the birthplace of modern rock climbing, and there are few places in the world that offer such a wide range of mountains, cliffs and crags in such a compact area – not to mention an ever-growing number of indoor climbing walls.

Areas for mountaineering in Britain include, naturally enough, the high mountains of Scotland (especially the northwest), with favourite spots including Glen Coe, the area around Ben Nevis and the Cuillin Ridge (p907) on Skye. In Wales, Snowdonia (p721) offers long and short routes, while England's main centre for long routes is the Lake District (p591), and there are some fine short routes here as well. Other popular areas for short or single-pitch climbing are the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales. In southern England, good climbing areas include Cheddar Gorge and the tors (rocky outcrops) of Dartmoor (p311). Britain also offers the exhilaration of sea-cliff climbing, most notably in Pembrokeshire and Cornwall; nothing makes you concentrate more on finding the next hold than waves crashing 30m below!

The website of the **British Mountaineering Council** (☎ 0870 010 4878; www.thebmc.co.uk) covers indoor climbing walls, access rules (don't forget, all mountains and outcrops are privately owned), competitions and so on. In Scotland, the main bodies are the **Scottish Mountaineering Club** (www.smc.org.uk) and the **Mountaineering Council of Scotland** (www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk).

UK climbing grades are different to those in the USA and continental Europe; there's a handy conversion table at www.rockfax.com/publications/grades.html.

Sailing & Windsurfing

Britain has a nautical heritage and sailing is a very popular pastime, in everything from tiny dinghies to ocean-going yachts. In recent years there's been a massive surge in windsurfing too. Places to sail in Britain include the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk, southeast England (eg, Brighton, Eastbourne and Dover), Devon, Cornwall, and the Solent (the stretch of water between the Isle of Wight and the south coast – and one of the most popular sailing areas in Britain). In Wales, places include the Gower Peninsula and Pembrokeshire. In Scotland, head for the Firth of Forth near Edinburgh, the area north of Largs (west of Glasgow), or Inverness. There are also many inland lakes and reservoirs, ideal for training, racing or just pottering.

CANAL & WATERWAY TRAVEL

Britain's inland waterways consist of rivers and lakes plus a surprisingly extensive canal network. Built in the early Industrial Revolution, canals were the country's main form of transport until railways boomed in the 19th century. Today, canals are alive again, part of a booming leisure-boat industry, dubbed the 'New Canal Age'. Mile-for-mile, canals are being restored and reopened at the same rate they were built in their 1790s heyday.

Travel by boat reveals a hidden side of Britain, as canals lead through a Britain of idyllic villages, pretty countryside and colourful waterside pubs. It also offers an unexpected view of cities like London and Birmingham. With 2000 miles of navigable canals and rivers, there's plenty to explore. Across the waterway network, boats are easily hired (for a few hours, a day or a week, or longer – no special skills are needed), and exploring Britain this way can be immensely rewarding. For families or groups it's a fascinating, fun and economical combination of transport and accommodation.

For more information see www.britishwaterways.co.uk and www.waterscape.com.

Your first port of call for any sailing or windsurfing matter should be the **Royal Yachting Association** (☎ 0845 345 0400; www.rya.org.uk). This organisation can provide all the details you need about training centres where you can learn the ropes, improve your skills or simply charter a boat for pleasure.

Surfing

If you've come from the other side of the world, you'll be delighted to learn that summer water temperatures in Britain are roughly equivalent to winter temperatures in southern Australia (approximately 13°C). But as long as you've got a wetsuit, there are many excellent surfing opportunities. Britain's huge tidal range means there's often a completely different set of breaks at low and high tides. Look for beaches that have been awarded 'blue flags', which means the local town authority is taking sea (and sand) cleanliness seriously.

The best places to start are Cornwall and Devon, where the west coast is exposed to the Atlantic; from Land's End to Ilfracombe there's a string of surf spots. Newquay (p332) is the British surf capital, with all the trappings from Kombi vans to bleached hair. In 2006, a national newspaper carried a story about two guys from Hawaii who spent a year in Cornwall because the surf was more intriguing and challenging. Away from the southwest hotspots, there are smaller surf scenes in Norfolk and in Yorkshire on the east coast of England.

Surfers Against Sewage (www.sas.org.uk) is an active campaign group whose name says it all. Although the situation is improving, some British towns still discharge a fair amount of crap into the sea.

Southwest Wales has many good surfing spots, including Manorbier, Newgale and Whitesands near St David's (p684). It's easy to hire boards and gear, or arrange lessons. In the south, conditions at Porthcawl are also very good and the Gower Peninsula has a lively scene, especially at Rhossili Bay (p672).

Scotland's west coast is mainly sheltered by islands, and on the east coast the swells are unreliable, so it's the north, particularly around Thurso (p899), which has outstanding world-class possibilities, and a surprisingly large and lively surf scene.

The main national organisation is the **British Surfing Association** (☎ 01637-876474; www.britsurf.co.uk); its website has news on approved instruction centres, courses, competitions and so on. Another good site is www.a1surf.com, with comprehensive links and weather forecasts. Combine these sites with *Surf UK* by Wayne Alderson, a comprehensive guidebook covering almost 400 breaks, and you're sorted.

Environment

The island of Britain consists of three nations: England in the south and centre, Scotland to the north and Wales to the west. Further west lies the island of Ireland. Looking southeast, France is just 20 miles away.

THE LAND

Geologically at least, Britain is part of Europe. It's on the edge of the Eurasian landmass, separated from the mother continent by the shallow English Channel. (The French are not so proprietorial, and call it La Manche – the sleeve.) About 10,000 years ago, Britain was *physically* part of Europe, but then sea levels rose and created the island we know today. Only in more recent times has there been a reconnection, in the form of the Channel Tunnel.

When it comes to topology, Britain is not a place of extremes. There are no Himalayas or Lake Baikals here. But there's plenty to keep you enthralled, and even a short journey can take you through a surprising mix of landscapes.

Southern England is covered in a mix of cities, towns and gently undulating countryside. East Anglia is almost entirely low and flat, while the Southwest Peninsula has wild moors, granite outcrops and rich pastures (Devon's cream is world famous), plus a rugged coast with sheltered beaches, making it a favourite holiday destination.

In the north of England, farmland remains interspersed with towns and cities, but the landscape is noticeably more bumpy. A line of large hills called the Pennines (fondly tagged 'the backbone of England') runs from Derbyshire to the Scottish border, and includes the peaty plateaus of the Peak District, the wild moors around Haworth (immortalised in Brontë novels), the delightful valleys of the Yorkshire Dales and the frequently windswept but ruggedly beautiful hills of Northumberland.

Perhaps England's best-known landscape is the Lake District, a small but spectacular cluster of mountains in the northwest, where Scaféll Pike (a towering 978m) is England's highest peak.

The landscape of Wales is also defined by hills and mountains: notably the rounded Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons in the south, and the spiky peaks of Snowdonia in the north, with Mt Snowdon (1085m) the highest peak in Wales. In between lie the wild Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales, rolling to the west coast of spectacular cliffs and shimmering river estuaries.

Ever wondered about the origin of Hastings, Stratford or Thorpeness? *Place Names in the Landscape* by Margaret Gelling is a fascinating study of the geographical roots of Britain's town and village titles.

COMPARING COVERAGE

Statistics can be boring, but these essential measurements may be handy for planning or perspective as you travel around:

Wales	8000 sq miles
Scotland	30,500 sq miles
England	50,000 sq miles
Britain	88,500 sq miles
UK	95,000 sq miles
British Isles	123,000 sq miles

For comparison, France is about 210,000 sq miles, Texas 260,000 sq miles, Australia nearly 3 million sq miles and the USA more than 3.5 million sq miles. When Britain is compared with these giants, it's amazing that such a small island can make so much noise.

For real mountains, though, you've got to go to Scotland, especially the wild, remote and thinly populated northwest Highlands – separated from the rest of the country by a diagonal gash in the earth's crust called the Boundary Fault. Ben Nevis (1343m) is Scotland's – and Britain's – highest mountain, but there are many more to choose from. The Highlands are further enhanced by the vast cluster of beautiful islands that lie off the loch-indented west coast.

South of the Scottish Highlands is a relatively flat area called the central Lowlands, home to the bulk of Scotland's population. Further south, down to the border with England, things get hillier again; this is the southern Uplands, a fertile farming area.

WILDLIFE

Britain is a small country, and some native plant and animal species are hidden away. However, there are undoubted gems, from woods carpeted in shimmering bluebells to a stately herd of deer in the mountains. This wildlife is part of the fabric of Britain, and having a closer look will enhance your trip enormously.

For more in-depth information on the nation's flora and fauna, www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk is a comprehensive, accessible, interactive, award-winning site.

Animals

When strolling through farmland and woodland areas, you'll easily spot birds such as the robin, with its red breast and cheerful whistle, and the yellowhammer, with its 'little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese' song. You might also hear the warbling cry of a skylark as it flutters high over the fields – a classic, but now threatened, sound of the British countryside.

Between the fields, hedges provide cover for flocks of finches, but these seedeaters must watch out for sparrowhawks – birds of prey that come from nowhere at tremendous speed. Other predators include barn owls, a wonderful sight as they fly silently along hedgerows listening for the faint rustle of a vole or shrew. In rural Wales or Scotland you may see a buzzard, Britain's most common large raptor.

Also in fields, look out for brown hare, another increasingly rare mammal species; they're related to rabbits but are much larger, with longer legs and ears. Males who battle for territory in early spring are, of course, as 'mad as a March hare'.

A classic British mammal is the red fox. You may only see one in the countryside, but these wily beasts adapt well to any situation, so you're just as likely to see them scavenging in towns, and even in city suburbs. A controversial law banning the hunting of foxes with dogs was introduced in 2005, but it's too early to see what impact this has had on population numbers.

WILD READING

To further your enjoyment of wildlife-watching, here are some useful guidebooks:

- *Complete Guide to British Wildlife* by Arlott, Fitter and Fitter is a highly recommended, portable single volume covering mammals, birds, fish, plants, snakes, insects and even fungi.
- *British Isles: Wildlife of Coastal Waters* by world-famous film-maker Tony Soper beautifully covers the birds, mammals and jellyfish you'll see from beach, boat and clifftop.
- *Birds, Trees, Fish* and *Wild Flowers* are part of the Gem series of books. They fit in your pocket, cost about £5 and are often sold at tourist offices.
- *Complete British Birds* by Paul Sterry is full of excellent photographs and handy notes, ideal for identifying anything feathered you may see on your travels.
- *Where to Watch Birds in Britain* by Simon Harrop and Nigel Redman is ideal if you need more detail about specific destinations.
- *Wildlife Walks* edited by Malcolm Tait (with a foreword by the nation's favourite ecologist, David Bellamy) suggest days out in more than 500 wildlife reserves across the country.

SEEING RED

The red squirrel used to be commonplace in many parts of woodland Britain, but it's now one of the country's most endangered mammal species. Where they once numbered in millions, populations have declined significantly over the last 50 years to about 150,000 – confined mainly to Scotland, with isolated groups in the Lake District, Norfolk and the Isle of Wight. The simple reason for this is the arrival of larger grey squirrels from America.

The problem isn't that grey squirrels attack their red cousins. The problem is food. Greys can eat hazelnuts and acorns when they are still tough, whereas reds can only eat these nuts when they're soft and ripe. So the greys get their fill first, and there's not much left for the reds. So thorough are the greys in cleaning up that, once they arrive in an area, the reds are usually gone within about 15 years.

One place where reds can do well is pine plantations, as they are more adept than greys at getting the seeds out of pine cones. However, even this advantage is threatened, as in recent years the indomitable and adaptable greys have started learning the cone seed-popping technique.

Another well-known British mammal is the black-and-white-striped badger. You'll probably only see the burrows of this nocturnal animal, but if you're driving at night you might catch sight of 'old Brock' in your headlights. Farmers believe badgers spread tuberculosis to cattle, although the evidence is inconclusive, and the debate rumbles on between the agricultural and environmental lobbies.

In woodland areas, mammals include the small white-spotted fallow deer and the even smaller roe deer. If you hear rustling among the fallen leaves it might be a hedgehog – a cute-looking, spiny-backed insect-eater – but it's an increasingly rare sound these days; conservationists say hedgehogs will be extinct in Britain by 2025, possibly due to increased building in rural areas, the use of insecticides in farming, and the changing nature of both the countryside and the city parks and gardens that once made up the hedgehog's traditional habitat. You're much more likely to see grey squirrels; introduced from North America, this species has proved so adaptable that native British red squirrels are severely endangered (see above). Much larger are pine martens, seen in some forested regions, especially in Scotland. With beautiful brown coats, they were once hunted for their fur, but are now fully protected.

Out of the trees and up in the moors, birds you might see include the red grouse, and the curlew with its elegant curved bill. Golden plovers are beautifully camouflaged so you have to look hard, but you can't miss the show-off lapwings with their spectacular aerial displays.

The most visible moorland mammal is the red deer. Herds survive on Exmoor and Dartmoor, in the Lake District, and in larger numbers in Scotland. The males are most spectacular after June, when their antlers have grown ready for the rutting season. The stags keep their antlers through the winter and then shed them again in February.

Mountain birds include red kites (in Wales there has been a successful project to reintroduce these spectacular fork-tailed raptors; see p706), while on the high peaks of Scotland you may see the grouse's northern cousin, the ptarmigan, dappled brown in the summer but white in the winter. Also in the Scottish mountains, keep an eye peeled for golden eagles, Britain's largest birds of prey, as they glide and soar along ridges.

If there's water nearby you have a chance of spotting an osprey; the best places in Britain to see this magnificent bird include Rutland Water (p434) and the Cairngorms (p883). You could also look along the riverbanks for signs of water voles, endearing rodents that were once very common but are now all but wiped out by wild mink, another American immigrant (first introduced to stock fur farms).

In contrast to water voles, the formerly rare otters are beginning to make a comeback after suffering from polluted water, habitat destruction and persecution by anglers. In southern Britain they inhabit the banks of rivers and lakes, and in Scotland they frequently live on the coast. Although their numbers are growing, they are mainly nocturnal and hard to see, but keep your eyes peeled and you might be lucky.

On the coasts of Britain, particularly in Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and northwest Scotland, the dramatic cliffs are a marvellous sight in early summer (around May), when they are home to hundreds of thousands of breeding seabirds. Guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes, among others, fight for space on impossibly crowded rock ledges. The sheer numbers of birds makes this one of Britain's finest wildlife spectacles, as the cliffs become white with droppings and the air fills with their shrill calls.

A great series of handy wildlife guides (*Trees, Birds, Wild Flowers, Insects* etc) is produced by the Wildlife Trusts (www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk). Proceeds from sales support environmental and educational campaigns.

Another bird to look out for in coastal areas is the comical puffin (especially common in Shetland), with its distinctive rainbow beak and 'nests' burrowed in sandy soil. In total contrast, gannets are one of the largest seabirds and make dramatic dives for fish, often from a great height.

And finally, the sea mammals. The grey seal and the common seal are two species of seal that frequent British coasts. Dolphins, porpoises, minke whales and basking sharks can all be seen off the west coast, particularly off Scotland, and especially from May to September when viewing conditions are better. Whale-watching trips (which are also good for seeing other marine wildlife) are available from several Scottish harbour towns, and we give details throughout this book.

Plants

In any part of Britain, the best places to see wildflowers are in areas that evade large-scale farming. For example, in the chalky hill country of southern England and in limestone areas such as the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales, many fields erupt with great profusions of cowslips and primroses in April and May. Some flowers prefer woodland, and the best time to visit these areas is also April and May. This is because the leaf canopy of the woods has at that time not fully developed, and this allows sunlight to break through to encourage plants such as bluebells (a beautiful and internationally rare species).

Another classic British plant is gorse – you can't miss the swathes of this spiky bush in heath areas, most notably in the New Forest in southern England. Legend says that it's the season for kissing when gorse blooms. Luckily, its vivid yellow flowers show year-round.

Britain has about 8% tree cover (3% non-native conifers, 5% native and mostly deciduous) – one of the lowest in Europe. In comparison, Italy has 22% tree cover, France 27%.

In contrast, the blooming season for heather is quite short. On the Scottish mountains, the Pennine moors of northern England, and Dartmoor in the south, the wild hill-country is covered in a riot of purple in August and September.

Britain's natural deciduous trees include oak, ash, hazel and rowan, with seeds and leaves supporting a vast range of insects and birds. The New Forest in southern England and the Forest of Dean on the Wales–England border are good examples of this type of habitat. In some parts of Scotland, stands of indigenous Caledonian pine can still be seen. As you travel through Britain you're also likely to see non-native pines, standing in plantations empty of wildlife – although an increasing number of deciduous trees are also planted these days.

NATIONAL PARKS

Way back in 1810, poet and outdoors-lover William Wordsworth suggested that the Lake District should be 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right'. More than a century later, the Lake District became a national park (although quite different from Wordsworth's vision), along with the Brecon Beacons, Cairngorms, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, New Forest, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, Northumberland, North York Moors, Peak District, Pembrokeshire Coast, Snowdonia and Yorkshire Dales. A new park, the South Downs in southern England, is in the process of being created.

Combined, Britain's national parks now cover over 10% of the country. It's an impressive total, but the term 'national park' can cause confusion. First, these areas are not state owned: nearly all land is private, belonging to farmers, companies, estates and conservation organisations. Second, they are not total wilderness areas, as in many other countries. In Britain's national parks you'll see roads, railways, villages and even towns. Development is strictly controlled, but about 250,000 people live and work inside national-park boundaries. Some of them work in industries such as quarrying, which ironically does great damage to these supposedly protected landscapes. On the flip side, these industries provide vital jobs (although sometimes for people outside the park), and several wildlife reserves have been established on former quarry sites.

Although national parks are not owned by the state, large sections of several national parks are owned by the National Trust (NT) – one of the largest charities in Britain – but the NT has no formal link with national park administrative bodies.

Despite these apparent anomalies, national parks still contain vast tracts of wild mountains and moorland, rolling downs and river valleys, and other areas of quiet countryside, all ideal for long walks, cycling, easy rambles, sightseeing or just lounging around. To help you get the best from the parks, they all have information centres, and all provide various recreational facilities (trails, car parks, camp sites etc) for visitors.

It's worth noting also that there are many beautiful parts of Britain that are *not* national parks (such as Mid Wales, North Pennine in England, and many parts of Scotland). These can be just as good for outdoor activities or for simply exploring by car or foot, and are often less crowded than the popular national parks.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

With Britain's long history of human occupation, it's not surprising that the land's appearance is almost totally the result of people's interactions with the environment. Ever since Neolithic farmers learnt how to make axes, trees have been cleared so that crops could be planted – a trend that has continued into our own time. In Scotland particularly, the Clearances of the 18th century (see p897) meant that people were moved off the land to make room for sheep, which nibbled to death any saplings brave enough to try growing on the mountainsides. Today, the Highlands is undoubtedly a wilderness, a place of stunning and rugged beauty, but don't be under any impression that it's 'natural' or 'unspoilt'.

Even more dramatic environmental changes hit rural areas after WWII, especially in England, when a drive to be self-reliant in food meant new

ACTING THE GOAT

Perhaps unexpectedly, Britain is home to herds of wild goats. They've gambolled on the moorland near Lynmouth in Devon for almost 1000 years, although they narrowly escaped a cull in 2005. Wild goats can also be seen on the Great Orme peninsula in North Wales, but these are new kids on the block, having been introduced only a century ago.

NATIONAL PARKS

Park	Features	Activities	Best time to visit	Page
Brecon Beacons	great green ridgelines, waterfalls: Welsh mountain ponies, red kites, buzzards, peregrine falcons, otters, kingfishers, dinosaurs	horse riding, cycling, caving, canoeing, hang-gliding	Mar & Apr - spring lambs shaking their tails	p693
Cairngorms	soaring snowy peaks, pine forests: ospreys, pine martens, wildcats, grouse, capercaillies	skiing, bird-watching, walking	Feb - for the snow	p879
Dartmoor	wild heath, marshy moorland: Dartmoor ponies, deer, otters, badgers, rabbits, buzzards, peregrine falcons, sheep	walking, horse riding	May & Jun - wildflowers in full bloom	p309
Exmoor	craggy sea cliffs, sweeping moors: red deer, Exmoor ponies, horned sheep	horse riding, walking	Sep - heather in bloom	p269
Lake District	majestic fells, rugged mountains, glassy lakes: ospreys, red squirrels, waterfowl, sparrowhawks, sheep, England's only golden eagles	walking, cycling, water sports	Sep & Oct - autumn colours abound & summer crowds have left	p591
Loch Lomond & Trossachs	sparkling lochs, brooding mountains: deer, squirrels, badgers, foxes, buzzards, otters	climbing, walking, cycling	Sep & Oct - after the summer rush	p825
New Forest	woodlands & heath: wild ponies, otters, owls, Dartford warblers, southern damselfly	walking, cycling, horse riding	Apr-Sep - wild ponies grazing	p219
Norfolk & Suffolk Broads	expansive shallow lakes & marshlands: water lilies, wildfowl, otters	walking, boating	Apr & May - birds most active	p484
Northumberland	wild rolling moors of heather & gorse: black grouse, red squirrels, sheep	walking, climbing, cycling	Mar, Apr & Sep - spring lambs & heather in bloom	p641
North York Moors	heather-clad hills & deep green valleys with lonely farms & isolated villages: curlews, golden plovers	walking, cycling	Aug & Sep - purple heather in bloom	p544
Peak District	high moors, tranquil dales, limestone caves: jackdaws, kestrels, grouse, rabbits, foxes, badgers &, of course, sheep	walking, cycling, hang-gliding	Apr & May - newborn lambs everywhere	p444
Pembrokeshire Coast	wave-ravaged shoreline of cliffs & beaches: puffins, fulmars, shearwaters, grey seals, dolphins, porpoises	walking, kayaking, coasteering, mountain biking, horse riding	Apr & May - spring flowers clinging to clifftops	p675
Snowdonia	major mountain ranges, lakes & estuaries: wild goats, choughs, red kites, curlews, Snowdon lilies, buzzards, polecats	walking, cycling, canoeing, sailing, horse riding	May-Sep - summit temperatures mellow out	p720
Yorkshire Dales	limestone hills & lush valleys (dales) cut through by rugged stone walls & spotted with the faded, spectral grandeur of monastic ruins	walking, cycling	Apr & May	p517

farming methods. This changed the landscape from a patchwork of small fields to a scene of vast prairies as walls were demolished, trees felled, ponds filled, wetlands drained and, most notably, hedgerows ripped out.

For many centuries, these hedgerows had formed a network of dense bushes, shrubs and trees that stretched across the countryside protecting fields from erosion, supporting a varied range of flowers and providing shelter for numerous insects, birds and small mammals. But in the postwar rush to improve farm yields, thousands of miles of hedgerow were destroyed. And the destruction continued into our own time; from 1984 to 2002, another 25% disappeared. However, farmers are now encouraged to 'set aside' hedges and other uncultivated areas as havens for wildlife, so the tide might be turning – albeit very slowly.

Britain's new 'hedgerows' are motorway verges. Totalling almost 116 sq miles, these long strips of grass and bushes support many rare plant species, insects and small mammals – that's why kestrels are often seen hovering nearby.

Ironically, despite the increased farm yields, the food produced is often of dubious quality, as simple realities such as tasteless carrots or national emergencies like the 'mad cow' disease of the 1990s clearly show. But you can't blame the farmers – well, not all of them. They have a living to earn, and are often encouraged to act in environmentally irresponsible ways by misguided directives (and vast subsidies) from the UK government and the EU.

Of course, environmental issues are not exclusive to rural areas. In Britain's towns and cities, topics such as air pollution, light pollution, levels of car use, road building, airport construction, public-transport provision and household-waste recycling are never far from the political agenda, although some might say they're not near enough to the top of the list. Over the past decade, the main political parties have lacked engagement, although in 2006, David Cameron, the new leader of the opposition Conservatives, declared that sustainability would henceforth be a major tenet of his party. His PR staff made a big deal of him cycling to work, which looked good (and would have been fine if they'd emphasised the health benefits of cycling) until it came to light his chauffer still drove his official car to parliament, carrying a huge stack of paperwork and a change of clothes. But political point-scoring aside, when it comes to real issues, apathy still abounds in most areas; for example, the Green Party enjoyed only modest support in the 2006 council elections – an increase of 20 councillors nationally, compared with a 300 swing from Labour to the Conservatives.

The Great Food Gamble, by well-known hard-hitting writer and broadcaster John Humphrys, studies the past 50 years of British agriculture, decrying factory farming, international subsidies, pollution and poor-quality food – among many other ills.

Meanwhile, back in rural Britain, in addition to hedgerow clearance, hot environmental issues include farming methods such as irrigation, monocropping and pesticide use.

The results of these unsustainable methods, say environmentalists, are rivers running dry, fish poisoned by runoff, and fields with one type of grass and not another plant to be seen. These 'green deserts' support no insects, which in turn means populations of some wild bird species dropped by an incredible 70% from 1970 to 1990. This is not a case of old wizened peasants recalling the idyllic days of their forebears; you only have to be over 30 in Britain to remember a countryside where birds such as skylarks or lapwings were visibly much more numerous.

Britain buries most of its rubbish in 'landfill sites'. By 2015, say environmental campaigners, these will all be full. Options will then be more recycling, or more controversial methods such as incineration.

But all is not lost. In the face of apparently overwhelming odds, Britain still boasts a great biodiversity, and some of the best wildlife habitats are protected to a greater or lesser extent, thanks to the creation of national parks and similar conservation zones – often within areas privately owned by conservation campaign groups such as the **Wildlife Trusts** (www.wildlifetrusts.org), **Woodland Trust** (www.woodland-trust.org), **National Trust** (NT; www.nationaltrust.org.uk) and **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (www.rspb.org.uk). Many of these areas are open to the public – ideal spots for walking, bird-watching or simply enjoying the peace and beauty of the countryside.

LOCAL VOICES – VOLUNTEERING *Fayette Fox*

Britain boasts many excellent, affordable volunteering opportunities for folks who enjoy working outdoors with their hands, learning new skills and meeting people. So what are you waiting for? Get out your wellies and go volunteer! Here are a few ideas:

Wwoof (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)

The premise is simple: Wwoofers offer their services to help on a farm, and in return stay as a guest with free room and board. There are thousands of Wwoof farms globally, but the organisation's roots are British. Londoner Sue Coppard started Wwoof in 1971, to get out into the countryside and support the organic movement. Today, underneath the agricultural exterior, **Wwoof** (www.wwoof.org/wwoof_uk) is also a cultural exchange, attracting international volunteers of all ages. Wwoofers usually help for a week or two, but they can stay longer or shorter by arrangement. Annual membership is a mere £15.

BTCV (British Trust of Conservation Volunteers)

BTCV (www.btcv.org.uk) volunteers work in the countryside on tasks such as removing invasive bracken, maintaining paths and repairing bridges. And it's not *all* donkey work; BTCV teaches traditional land-management methods such as dry stone walling and coppicing. No experience is necessary, just a willingness to muck in. Groups stay in basic accommodation and cook meals together. It's a great way to meet people from all over the UK. Weekend and week-long projects across Britain are offered year-round, the cost is about £65 and £150 respectively. If time is short, day-long conservation activities are free of charge.

Other Options

Other options include working holidays with the **National Trust** (NT; www.nationaltrust.org.uk); this organisation offers a range of volunteering trips catering to different ages and interests. For something wilder, in Scotland the **John Muir Trust** (www.jmt.org) runs activities and conservation projects from April to October, typically at the weekend. Volunteering is free, but you have to arrange your own food and accommodation. There are sometimes opportunities for camping.

Fayette Fox – Wwoof and BTCV volunteer

Also on the plus side, and especially important for an island such as Britain, sea protection is better than it's ever been. Major efforts have been made to stem the flow of sewage into the sea. Oil spills still occur, but the clean-up process is quick and efficient. While some coastal areas may still be dirty and polluted, there are many other areas (around southwest England, and much of Wales and Scotland, for example) where the water is clear and many popular holiday beaches are proud holders of 'blue flag' awards. These awards show they meet international standards of cleanliness – on the sand and in the waves. The birds and whales like clean water too, the tourists are happy, the locals make some money and the scenery is stunning. Everybody wins!

Food & Drink

Britain once boasted a cuisine so undesirable that there's still no equivalent in the English language for the phrase *bon appétit*. But today the tide has turned: in 2005, food bible *Gourmet* magazine said London has the best restaurants in the world, and it's now easy to find good food in other cities, towns and villages as you travel around the country. And while epicures can splash out big bucks on fine dining, tasty eating in Britain definitely won't break the bank for more budget-conscious visitors either.

Having said that, Britain's culinary heritage of ready-sliced white bread, fatty meats and vegetables boiled to death, all washed down by tea with four sugars, remains firmly in place in many parts of the country. And that's before we get on to treats like pork scratchings and deep-fried Mars bars.

Why the improvement? Reasons include the infamous outbreaks of foot-and-mouth and 'mad cow' disease. They're history now, and British beef is once again exported to the world, but an upside of the bad press was a massive surge in demand for better quality food, so there's now a plethora of natural, unadulterated, chemical-free products available in shops, markets and restaurants across the country.

For locals and visitors alike, better food often means organic food, but there are some anomalies: those organic tomatoes taste good, but is it environmentally friendly to fly them in from Spain? Same goes for organic avocados from Thailand, or organic peas from Kenya (where, incidentally, local people see their crops and cattle die as large-scale market gardens dam rivers and take all the water). Meanwhile, it seems impossible to buy British apples in supermarkets during the autumn cropping season, although you can always chose between 10 different varieties flown in from New Zealand, Chile or South Africa.

According to leading organic-food campaign group the Soil Association (www.soilassociation.org), three out of four households in Britain buy organic food.

But despite 'food miles' and other dilemmas, British food continues to change for the better. Another reason for the improvement is outside influence. For decades most towns have boasted Chinese and Indian restaurants, so chow mein is no longer considered exotic and it's quite usual for British people to cook up chicken tikka masala, whatever their racial heritage. And out on the street, curry is the most popular takeaway food in Britain, outstripping even fish and chips.

Alongside the food in 'Indian' restaurants (in many cases actually owned and staffed by people from Pakistan or Bangladesh), dishes from Japan, Korea, Thailand and other countries east of Suez have become readily available too. From the other side of the world, there's been a growth in restaurants specialising in South American, African or Caribbean cuisine. Closer to home, pastas and a wide range of Mediterranean specialities – from countries as diverse as Morocco and Greece – are commonplace not only in decent restaurants, but also in everyday cafés and pubs.

Good food in pubs? Yes indeed. Not so many years ago if you felt peckish in your average British boozer, your choice would be a ham or cheese roll, with pickled onions if you were lucky. These days, pubs are a good-value option whether you're looking for a toasted sandwich or a three-course meal.

'Gastropubs' specialise in truly excellent food, but still maintain a relaxed informal atmosphere. You'll find mismatched cutlery, no tablecloths and waiters in T-shirts, and you pay at the bar along with your drinks, but nothing beats the luxury of a wholesome shepherd's pie washed down by a decent real ale without the worry of guessing which fork to use. This in turn is part of a growing trend in Britain to order good beer to accompany food, rather than automatically turning to the wine-list.

VEGETARIANS

It's official – vegetarians are no longer weird. Many restaurants and pubs in England have at least a token vegetarian dish (another meat-free lasagne, anyone?), but better places offer much more imaginative choices. Vegans will find the going more tricky, except of course at dedicated veggie/vegan restaurants – and where possible we recommend good options throughout this book. For more ideas see www.happycow.com.

Of course, there's more to eating than restaurants and gastropubs. Lavishly illustrated food sections in weekend newspapers indicate that cooking at home is now officially fashionable. Feeding on this is the current phenomenon of 'celebrity chefs', including Hugh Fernley-Whittingstall who famously scored a £2 million deal with his publishers in early 2006, and Gordon Ramsay who featured in a list of Britain's richest self-made entrepreneurs a few months later. They are not alone. Every night, on a TV channel near you, a star of the kitchen demonstrates imaginative and simple techniques for producing stylish, tasty and healthy food.

But behind the scenes, the Brits still have an odd attitude to eating at home. They love to sit on the sofa and *watch* TV food shows. Inspired, they rush out and buy all the glossy cookery books. Then on the way back home, they pop into the supermarket and buy a stack of ready-made meals. Freshly created food sounds great in theory, but in reality the recipe for dinner is more likely to be something like this: open freezer, take out package, bung in microwave, ping, eat.

Rick Stein is a TV chef, energetic restaurateur and real-food evangelist. His book *Food Heroes* extols small-scale producers and products, from organic veg to free-roaming wild-boar sausages.

In fact, more junk food and ready-made meals are consumed in the UK than in the rest of Europe put together. So it's no surprise that the British are getting increasingly heavy, with over 60% of the adult population overweight, and almost 25% clinically obese. But despite the vast intakes, average nutrition rates are lower now than they were in the 1950s when postwar rationing was still in force. Yes, without doubt, you can find great food in Britain. It's just that not all the Brits seem to like eating it.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

In the view of many outsiders, a typical British dinner is a plate of roast beef. It's more of an English tradition than a British one (and is also why the French call English people *'les rosbifs'*), but good-quality roasts from well-reared cattle grace menus everywhere from Cornwall to the Highlands. Perhaps the most famous beef comes from Scotland's Aberdeen Angus cattle, while the best-known food from Wales is lamb (although a lowly vegetable, the leek, is a national emblem). Venison – usually from red deer – is readily available in Scotland, as well as in parts of Wales and England, most notably in the New Forest.

The traditional accompaniment for British beef is Yorkshire pudding. It's simply roast batter, but very tasty when properly cooked. In pubs and cafés – especially in northern England – you can buy big bowl-shaped Yorkshire puddings filled with meat stew, beans, vegetables or – in these multicultural days – curry.

Particular English specialities include Melton Mowbray pork pies (motto: 'gracious goodness for over 100 years'), cooked ham compressed in a casing of pastry – always eaten cold, ideally with pickle. A legal victory in 2005 ensured that only pies made in the eponymous Midlands town could carry the Melton Mowbray moniker – in the same way that fizzy wine from other regions can't be called Champagne.

Then there's rhubarb, the juicy stem of a large-leafed garden plant, best eaten in a 'crumble' – a topping of mixed flour, butter and sugar – served with custard or ice cream. For much of the 20th century, rhubarb was a very popular food, with overnight trains dubbed the 'rhubarb express' bringing tons of the stuff to London and the cities of the south from the main growing area in Yorkshire, between the towns of Leeds, Wakefield and Morely, known – inevitably – as the 'rhubarb triangle'. It fell out of fashion around the 1980s but is currently enjoying a renaissance, in gourmet restaurants as well as humble kitchens.

Perhaps less appealing, another English speciality is black pudding, effectively a large sausage made from ground meat, offal, fat and blood, and traditionally served for breakfast. It's known in other countries as 'blood sausage', but the English version has a high content of oatmeal so doesn't fall apart in the pan when fried.

In Yorkshire, the eponymous pudding is traditionally eaten *before* the main meal. This harks back to days when food was scarce. The pudding was a stomach-filler, so you didn't worry so much about a tiny main course.

Moving onto an altogether sweeter pudding, Bakewell pudding is an English speciality that blundered into the recipe books around 1860 when a cook at the Rutland Arms Hotel in the Derbyshire town of Bakewell was making a strawberry tart, but mistakenly (some stories say drunkenly) spread the egg mixture on top of the jam instead of stirring it into the pastry. Especially in northern England, the Bakewell pudding (pudding, mark you, not 'Bakewell tart' as it's sometimes erroneously called) features regularly on local dessert menus and is certainly worth sampling.

Also in the pudding club is plum pudding, a dome-shaped cake with fruit, nuts and sometimes brandy or rum, traditionally eaten at Christmas, when it's called – surprise, surprise – Christmas pudding. This pudding is steamed rather than baked, cut into slices and served with brandy butter. It's eaten after the equally traditional Christmas lunch of turkey and Brussels sprouts, and shortly before the traditional sleep on the sofa when the Queen's speech is on TV. Watch out for the small coins inserted in Christmas pudding by superstitious cooks – if you bite on one it means good luck for the following year, but may play hell with your fillings.

Staying with the sweet stuff, international favourite banoffee pie, a dessert made from bananas, boiled condensed milk and whipped cream, was first developed in a pub in Sussex in southern England in the early 1970s. A plaque on the wall commemorates this landmark culinary event.

Back to the meat, and a local speciality in northern England is Cumberland sausage, a tasty mix of minced meat and herbs so large it has to be spiralled to fit on your plate. Bring sausage and Yorkshire pud together and you have another classic British dish: toad-in-the-hole.

Alongside meat options, a classic British staple is fish and chips – often served in pubs and cafés, or available from the local 'chippie' (takeaway). Sometimes it's greasy and tasteless, especially once you get far from the sea, but at towns with salt in the air this deep-fried delight is always worth trying. Yorkshire's coastal resorts are particularly famous for huge servings of cod – despite it becoming an endangered species thanks to overfishing. Other seafood specialities include Norfolk crab and Northumberland kippers,

LES ROSBIFS RESPOND

British meat consumption – and British farming – took a nose-dive in 2001 following outbreaks of 'mad cow' and foot-and-mouth disease. These events were notoriously recalled in 2005 by France's President Jacques Chirac: joking with fellow leaders at an international conference, he reportedly quipped about the British, 'The only thing they have done for European agriculture is mad cow', and 'You can't trust people who cook as badly as that…it's the country with the worst food'. Mr Chirac's comments are based, we assume, on the food he'd been served at state banquets rather than a steak pie he'd bought in a local gastropub.

NAME THAT PASTY

A favourite in Southwest England is the Cornish pasty – originally a mix of cooked vegetables wrapped in pastry – now available in many parts of Britain and often including meat varieties (much to the chagrin of the Cornish people). Invented long before Tupperware, the pasty was an all-in-one-lunchpack that tin miners carried underground and left on a ledge ready for mealtime. So pasties weren't mixed up, they were marked with owners' initials – always at one end, so the miner could eat half and safely leave the rest to snack on later without it mistakenly disappearing into the mouth of a workmate. And before going back to the surface, the miners traditionally left the last corner of the pasty as a gift for the spirits of the mine known as 'knockers', to ensure a safe shift the next day.

while restaurants in Scotland, west Wales and Southwest England regularly conjure up prawns, lobsters, oysters, mussels and scallops.

Another British staple – found especially in pubs at lunchtime – is the ploughman's lunch. This is essentially bread and cheese, and although hearty farm-workers carried their lunch to the fields (probably wrapped in a red spotted handkerchief) over many centuries, this meal is actually a modern phenomenon, invented in the 1960s by the national cheesemakers' organisation to boost consumption, cashing in on public nostalgia and fondness for tradition – even if it was fake.

You can still find a basic ploughman's lunch in some pubs – and it undeniably goes well with a pint or two of local ale – but these days it's usually been smartened up to include butter, salad, pickle, dressings and a selection of cheeses. You'll also find other variations, such as farmer's lunch (bread and chicken), stockman's lunch (bread and ham), Frenchman's lunch (brie and baguette) and fisherman's lunch (you guessed it, with fish).

Like the taste of meat, but don't like the idea of battery pens? Lamb, beef, chicken and salmon producers approved by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) are listed at www.farmgate direct.com.

For cheese and bread in a different combination, try Welsh rarebit – a sophisticated variation of cheese on toast, seasoned and flavoured with butter, milk and sometimes a little beer. Other traditional Welsh dishes include *bara brith* (spicy fruit loaf), *cawl* (a thick broth) and *laverbread* – not a bread at all, but seaweed, often served with oatmeal and bacon on toast, a very tasty combination.

In Scotland, instead of toast at breakfast, you might get oatcakes – in sweet and salty varieties. Scones are larger, and Scottish bakeries usually offer milk scones and griddle scones as well as plain varieties. Other sweet temptations include *bannocks* (half-scone/half-pancake), shortbread (a sweet biscuit) and Dundee cake (a rich fruit mix topped with almonds). While you're at the bakery, you'll see *stovies* (tasty pies of meat, mashed onion and fried potato) and Scotch pies (hard-cased pies of minced meat, sometimes eaten cold). In restaurants and cafés, look out for Scotch broth (a thick soup of barley, lentils and mutton stock), sometimes offered as a starter, but filling enough as a meal in itself.

Of course, the Scottish food that everyone knows is haggis, Scotland's national dish, essentially a large sausage made from a sheep's stomach filled with minced meat and oatmeal. Some restaurants in Scotland serve haggis and it's also available deep-fried at takeaways. If you're wary of a full helping of the Scottish national dish, search the menu for Highland chicken, a meal that stuffs portions of haggis mix into baked chicken – that way you can sample a small serving.

Scottish salmon is also well known, and available everywhere in Britain smoked or poached, but there's a big difference between bland fatty salmon from fish farms and the lean tasty wild version. The latter is more expensive, but as well as the taste, there are sound environmental reasons for preferring the nonfarmed variety. Other British seafood includes herring, trout and haddock; in Scotland the latter is best enjoyed with potato and cream in the old-style soup called *cullen skink*.

And finally, if you feel like something more fundamental, more earthy, to spread on your toast, look no further than Marmite – a dark and pungent yeast extract that generations of Britons either loved or hated with a passion through childhood. Similar to the Australian favourite, Vegemite (but not the same – oh no, sir!), it's popular at breakfast and especially great for late night munchies. In 2006, when the manufacturer of Marmite moved from selling the stuff in a near-spherical glass jar to a (much more practical) plastic tube, much was the consternation across the land, and even before this dreaded event conspiracists quickly noticed that the consistency of Marmite had changed – presumably so it would flow better through the new-fangled plastic tube.

DRINKS

If you're from overseas and a local asks 'would you like a drink?', don't automatically expect a gin and tonic. They may mean a 'cuppa' – a cup of tea – Britain's best-known beverage, sometimes dubbed the 'national drink'. In reality, coffee is equally popular these days; Brits consume 165 million cups a day and the British coffee market is worth £700 million a year – but with the prices some coffee shops charge, maybe that's not surprising.

Among alcoholic drinks, Britain is best-known for its beer. Typical British beer is technically called ale, dark brown to brick red in colour, and generally served at room temperature. It's more commonly called 'bitter' in England and Wales. This is to distinguish it from lager – the drink that most of the rest of the word calls 'beer' – generally yellow and served cold. (In Scotland, ales are designated by strength – light, heavy, export and strong – or by a notional 'shilling' scale; so you'd order a 'pint of heavy' or a 'pint of eighty shilling' rather than simply a 'pint of bitter'.)

The Campaign for Real Ale (www.camra.org.uk) promotes the understanding of traditional British beer – and recommends good pubs that serve it. Look for endorsement stickers on pub windows.

International lager brands such as Foster's and Budweiser are available in Britain, but as you travel around the country, you should definitely try some traditional beer, also known as real ale. But be ready! If you're used to the 'amber nectar' or 'king of beers' a local British brew may come as a shock. A warm, flat and expensive shock. This is partly to do with Britain's climate and partly to do with the beer being served by hand pump rather than gas pressure. Most important, though, is the integral flavour: traditional British beer doesn't *need* to be chilled or fizzed to make it palatable. (Drink a cheap lager that has sat in its glass for an hour and you'll see it has very little actual taste.)

CLASSIC BREWS

For students of real ale, classic brewery names to look out for and beers to sample as you travel around Britain include Adnams (eastern England), Arkells (south, Southwest England), Belhaven (Scotland), Black Sheep (northern England), Brains (Wales), Caledonian (Scotland and northern England), Felinfoel (Wales), Fullers (southeast England), Greene King (Eastern, central, southern England), Hardys & Hansons (central England), Hook Norton (English Midlands), Jennings (northwest England), Marston's (central, northern England), Orkney Brewery (Scotland), St Austel (western England), Shepherd Neam (southeast England), Timothy Taylor (northern England) and Wadworth (western England). For more ideas, tipplers' favourite tomes include the annual *Good Beer Guide to Great Britain*, produced by the Campaign for Real Ale, steering you to the best beers and the pubs that serve them, and the *Good Pub Guide*, detailing thousands of fine establishments across the country. Look out too for the wonderful *300 Beers to Try Before you Die* by Roger Protz; unashamedly jumping on the current trend for lists, this homage to British beers (and a few from other countries) is educational and jolly good fun.

Another key feature is that real ale must be looked after, meaning a willingness on the part of pub landlords to put in extra effort – usually on food and atmosphere, as well as beer. Beware of places promising real ale where bar staff give the barrels as much care as the condom machine in the toilets. There's nothing worse than a bad pint of real ale.

If beer doesn't tickle your palate, try cider – available in sweet and dry varieties. In western parts of England, notably Herefordshire and the counties of the Southwest Peninsula, you could try 'scrumpy', a very strong dry cider traditionally made from local apples. Many pubs serve it straight from the barrel.

On hot summer days, you could go for shandy – beer (lager or bitter) and lemonade mixed in equal quantities – an astonishing combination for some visitors, but very refreshing and, of course, not very strong. Another hybrid is 'snakebite' – an equal mix of cider and lager, favoured especially by students, as it reputedly gets you drunk quickly – thanks to the lager's bubbles and the cider's strength.

For tasty details on the whereabouts of farmers markets see www.farmersmarkets.net.

The usual arrays of gin, vodka, rum and so on are served in pubs and bars, but the spirit most visitors associate with Britain – and especially Scotland – is whisky (spelt without an 'e' if it's Scottish). More than 2000 brands are produced, but the two main kinds are single malt, made from malted barley, and blended whisky, made from unmalted grain blended with malts. Single malts are rarer (there are only about 100 brands) and more expensive.

When ordering a dram in Scotland remember to ask for whisky – only the English and other foreigners say 'Scotch' (what else would you be served in Scotland?). And if you're bemused by the wide choice, ask to try a local whisky – although if your budget is low, you might want to check the price first. A measure of blended whisky costs around £1.50 to £2.50, a straightforward single malt around £2 to £3, while a rare classic could be £10 or more.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

There's a huge choice of places to eat in Britain, and this section outlines just some of your options. For details on opening times, see p953. See p961 for details of the tricky issue of tipping, or p954 for some information on restaurants' attitudes to kids.

For picnics or self-catering, markets can be a great place for food bargains – everything from dented tins of tomatoes for 1p to home-baked cakes and organic goat cheese. Farmers markets are always worth a browse; they're a great way for producers to sell good wholesome food direct to consumers, with both sides avoiding the grip of the supermarkets.

Cafés & Teashops

The traditional British café is nothing like its Continental namesake. For a start, asking for a brandy with your coffee may cause confusion, as most British cafés don't serve alcohol. Often pronounced 'caffy', or shortened to 'caff', most are basic places serving basic food. Meals like meat pie or omelette with chips cost around £3. Sandwiches, cakes and other snacks are £1 to £2.

Some cafés definitely earn their 'greasy spoon' handle, while others are neat and friendly. Smarter cafés are called teashops, and you might pay a bit extra for extras like twee décor and table service. In country areas, many villages have cafés catering for tourists, walkers, cyclists and other outdoor types, and in summer they're open every day. Like good B&Bs, good cafés are a wonderful institution and always worth a stop during your travels.

EATING INTO THE FINANCES

Most of the Eating sections throughout this book are divided into three price bands: budget (meals under £10 per person), midrange (£10 to £20) and top end (over £20). In London the breakdown is budget – under £15; midrange – £15 to £40; top end – over £40. For more guidance, see Costs, p24.

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

For years, the regulations concerning smoking in restaurants in Britain have been vague or non-existent. Some places provided nonsmoking areas, while others didn't bother – meaning the smokers at the next table wouldn't hesitate to spark up even if you were halfway through your meal. 'It's my right to smoke,' they might say, and then look hurt if other diners said, 'it's my right not to breath your fumes, go home smelling like an ashtray and risk contracting cancer'. But the days of such disputes are over: a new Health Act will be enforced in summer 2007, banning smoking in 'all enclosed public places apart from licensed premises that do not serve or prepare food' throughout England and Wales, replicating a similar law already in force in Scotland. In short, this means all restaurants in Britain are completely nonsmoking, as are pubs serving food. Pubs that make most of their money from beer, as opposed to food, will probably stop offering dodgy pies and cheese rolls, and allow smoking to continue. Throughout 2006 a fascinating debate raged: does a packet of peanuts count as 'food'? And what about pickled eggs? By the time you read this book, we'll know.

As well as the traditional establishments, in most cities and towns you'll also find American-flavoured coffee shops – there seems to be a Starbucks on every corner – and Euro-style café-bars, serving decent lattes and espressos, and offering bagels or ciabattas rather than beans on toast (and you'll probably be able to get that brandy too). Some of these modern places even have outside chairs and tables – rather brave considering the narrow pavements and inclement weather much of Britain enjoys.

Since the major coffee-shop chains arrived in Britain in the 1990s, around 80% of local cafés have closed. *Eggs, Bacon, Chips & Beans* by Russell Davies celebrates this dying breed.

Restaurants

London has scores of excellent eateries that could hold their own in major cities worldwide, while places in Bath, Cardiff, Leeds, Edinburgh and Manchester give London a run for its money (actually, often for rather less money). We've taken great pleasure in seeking out some of the best and best-value restaurants in Britain, and recommending a small selection throughout this book.

Prices vary considerably across the country, with a main course in a straightforward restaurant around £7 to £10, rising to £15 or £20 at good-quality places. Utterly excellent food, service and surroundings can be enjoyed for £30 to £50 per person – although in London you can, if you want, pay double this.

Pubs & Bars

The difference between pubs and bars is sometimes vague, but generally bars are smarter, larger and louder than pubs, with a younger crowd. Drinks are more expensive too, unless there's a gallon-of-vodka-and-Red-Bull-for-a-fiver promotion – which there often is.

And while we're serving out warnings, here are two more. First, if you see a pub calling itself a 'free house' it's simply a place that doesn't belong to a brewery or pub company, and thus is free to sell any brewer's beer. Unfortunately, it doesn't mean the beer is free of charge. Second, please remember that drinks in British pubs are ordered and paid for at the bar. If the pub serves food, that's usually ordered and paid for at the bar as well. You can always spot the out-of-towners – they're the ones sitting forlornly at a bare table wondering why a waiter hasn't arrived.

DRINKING IN HISTORY

As you travel around Britain, in between visits to castles and cathedrals you'll probably visit a few pubs, where you can't fail to notice the splendid selection of pub names, often illustrated with attractive signboards. In days gone by, these signs were vital because most of the ale-swilling populace couldn't read. In our more literate era, pub signs are still a feature of the landscape, and remain as much a part of British history as medieval churches or fine stately homes.

Many pub names have connections to royalty. The most popular is the Red Lion, with more than 500 pubs in Britain bearing this title. It dates from the early 17th century, when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England. Lest the populace forget his origin, he ordered that the lion, his heraldic symbol, be displayed in public places.

The second most popular pub name is the Crown, which has more obvious royal connections, while the third most popular, the Royal Oak, recalls the days when King Charles II escaped Cromwell's republican army by hiding in a tree. (Look hard at most Royal Oak pub signs and you'll see his face peeping out from between the leaves.)

The King's Arms is another popular pub name with clear royal connections, as is the Queen's Head, the Prince of Wales and so on. Less obvious is the White Hart, the heraldic symbol of Richard II, who in 1393 decreed that every pub should display a sign to distinguish it from other buildings. The decree rounded off by saying anyone failing in this duty 'shall forfeit his ale', so many landlords chose the White Hart as a sign of allegiance, and an insurance against stock loss.

Another common pub name is the Rose and Crown. Again, the regal links are obvious, but look carefully at the colour of the rose painted on those signs, especially if you're in the north of England. West of the Pennine Hills it should be the red rose of the House of Lancaster; east of the Pennines it's the white rose depicting the House of York. Woe betide any pub sign that is sporting the wrong colour!

While some pub names crop up in their hundreds, others are far from common, although many still have links to history. Nottingham's most famous pub, Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, commemorates knights and soldiers departing for crusades in the Holy Land in the 12th century. Pub names such as the George and Dragon may date from the same era – as a story brought back from the East by returning crusaders. Move on several centuries and pub names such as the Spitfire, the Lancaster or the Churchill recall the days of WWII.

For a more local perspective, the Nobody Inn near Exeter in Devon is said to recall a mix-up over a coffin, a pub called the Hit or Miss near Chippenham in Wiltshire recalls a close-run game of village cricket, while the Quiet Woman near Buxton in Derbyshire, with a sign of a headless female, is a reminder of more-chauvinistic times.

When it comes to gratuities, it's not usual to tip bar staff, as it is in America. However, if you're ordering a large round, or the service has been good, you can say to the person behind the bar 'and one for yourself'. They may not actually have a drink, but they'll add the monetary equivalent to the total you pay and keep it as a tip.

Apart from good service, what makes a good pub? It's often surprisingly hard to pin down, but in our opinion, the best pubs follow a remarkably simple formula: they offer a welcoming atmosphere, pleasant surroundings, and in villages where pubs have been the centre of the community for centuries, they often offer a sense of history too (see the boxed text, above). The best pubs also offer a good range of hand-pulled beer, and a good menu of snacks and meals, cooked on the premises, not shipped in by the truck-full and defrosted in the microwave. After months of painstaking research, this is the type of pub that we recommend throughout this book. Of course there are many more pubs in Britain than even we could sample, and nothing beats the fun of doing your own investigation, so, armed with the advice in this book, we urge you to get out there and tipple your tastebuds.

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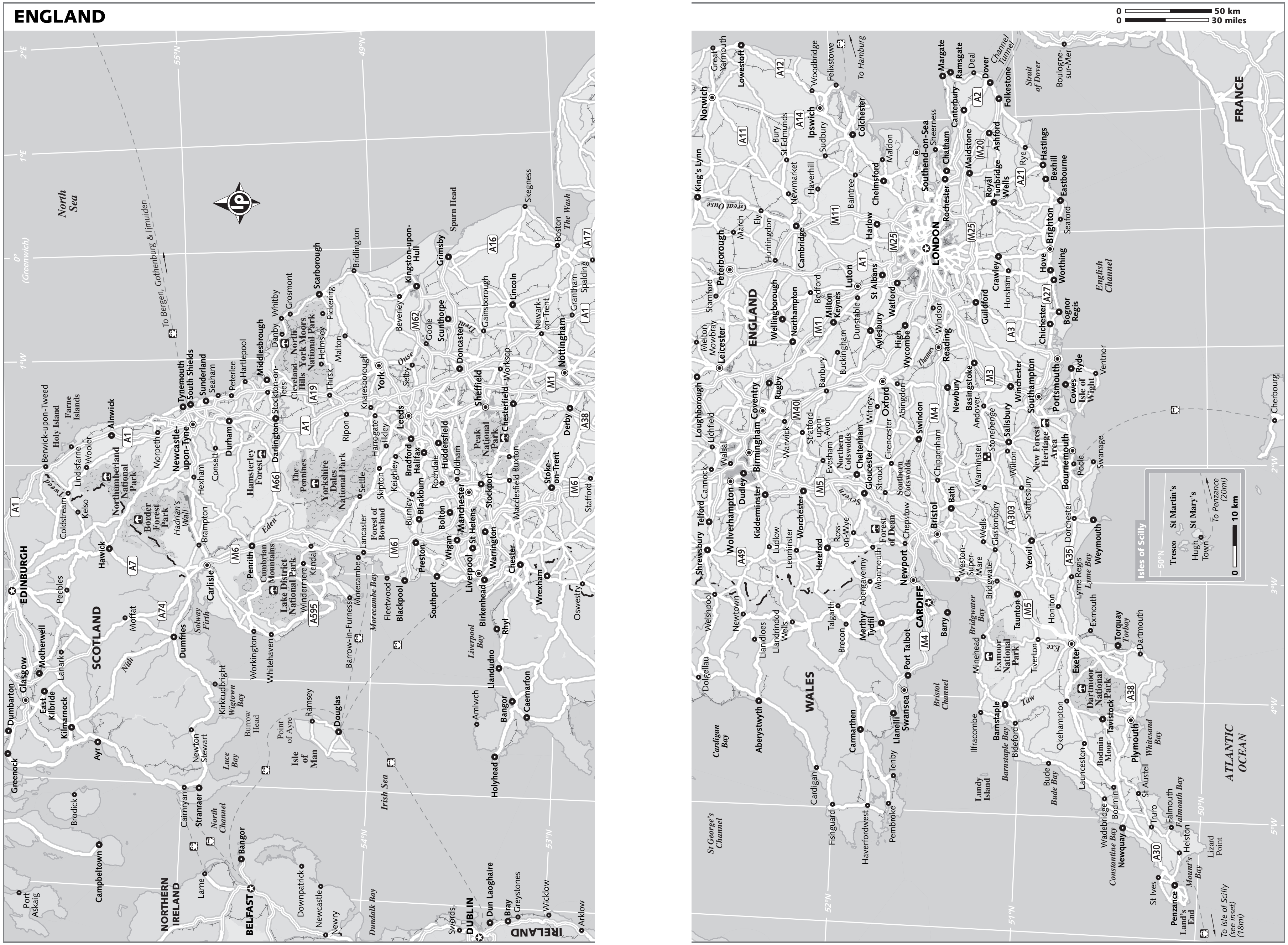
England

DAVID TOMLINSON

ENGLAND


0 50 km
0 30 miles
North Sea
To Bergen, Gothenburg & Ijmuiden
English Channel
Strait of Dover
Channel Tunnel
To Hamburg
Irish Sea
St George's Channel
Cardigan Bay
Bristol Channel
ATLANTIC OCEAN
FRANCE
SCOTLAND
ENGLAND
WALES
NORTHERN IRELAND
IRELAND
EDINBURGH
LONDON
CARDIFF
BELFAST
DUBLIN
Glasgow
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Carlisle
Durham
Middlesbrough
Sunderland
Scarborough
York
Leeds
Bradford
Manchester
Liverpool
Sheffield
Nottingham
Lincoln
Kingston-upon-Hull
Grimsby
Lake District National Park
Yorkshire Dales National Park
North York Moors National Park
Peak National Park
Northumberland National Park
Isle of Man
Douglas
Chester
Stoke-on-Trent
Derby
Birmingham
Coventry
Leicester
Norwich
Cambridge
Oxford
Bristol
Bath
Exeter
Plymouth
Penzance
Land's End
Southampton
Portsmouth
Brighton
Dover
Canterbury
Ipswich
Colchester
Isles of Scilly
Tresco
St Martin's
St Mary's
Hugh Town
To Penzance (20mi)
10 km
To Isle of Scilly (see inset) (18mi)
Dartmoor National Park
Exmoor National Park
New Forest Heritage Area
Isle of Wight
Swansea
Newport
Cherbourg
Boulogne-sur-Mer

London

London has a buzz unlike any other European city. It's fashion forward, ethnically diverse and artistically pioneering, while its unique geographical position between Continental Europe and the USA gives it the best of both cultural worlds. Hollywood stars are queuing up to tread the West End boards yet cheap flights link the capital easily to European cities and beer still runs on tap. Londoners are a proud lot, and rightly so.

With gastropubs, dim-sum joints and gourmet-burger places continuing to propagate, a multitude of cuisines on your plate and a raft of celebrity chefs dishing up, the restaurant scene is five-star. For night-owls there's excellent comedy, theatre, superclubs, DJ bars, and a growing number of 'activity venues' where you can bowl, skate or sing while you drink. Shopaholics can get their fix here with internationally respected home-grown designers, affordable catwalk copies, tantalising food halls and Aladdin's cave markets. The museums are first-rate, with vast, fascinating galleries you could lose yourself in and world-class exhibitions. Glittering modern architecture continues to enhance the skyline with the Swiss Re building and City Hall.

Yes, the city is eye-bogglingly huge and teeming with people but its vibrant multiculturalism is a vital part of London's identity. With so many different communities and neighbourhoods, as comic Jimmy Carr says, 'even a local can feel like a tourist'.

Having won the 2012 Olympics bid and largely survived acts of terrorism, London is sailing high on a wave of determination, optimism and glee. Lucky you, coming along for the ride.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoying a bird's-eye view from a glass pod on the **London Eye** (p145)
- Spotting famous faces at the **National Portrait Gallery** (p135)
- Soaking up the atmosphere at **Columbia Road Flower Market** (p177) on a Sunday
- Travelling back in time at the **Tower of London** (p142)
- Watching the sun rise over the city from **Parliament Hill** (p149)
- Absorbing the hushed magic of the **Inns of Court** (p140)

TELEPHONE CODE: 020	POPULATION: 7.43 MILLION	AREA: 607 SQ MILES

HISTORY

Celts first established themselves around a ford across the River Thames. However, it was the Romans who developed the 'square mile' now known as the City of London (which lies within today's Greater London city – note the small 'c') with a crossing, near today's London Bridge, that served as the hub of their road system. By the end of the 3rd century AD 'Londinium' was almost as multicultural as it is today with 30,000 people of various ethnic groups (albeit all Roman citizens, of course) and temples dedicated to a large number of cults. Parts of London like Aldgate and Ludgate get their names from the gates of the original city walls built by the Romans. Internal strife and relentless barbarian attacks took their toll on the Romans, who abandoned Britain in the 5th century, reducing the conurbation to a sparsely populated backwater.

The Saxons then moved in to the area, establishing farmsteads and villages, and their 'Lundenwic' prospered, becoming a large, well-organised town divided into 20 different wards. As the city grew in importance, it caught the eye of Danish Vikings who launched many invasions and razed the city in the 9th century. The Saxons held on until, finally beaten down in 1016, they were forced to accept the Danish leader Knut (Canute) as King of England, after which London replaced Winchester as the capital. In 1042 the throne reverted to the Saxon Edward the Confessor, whose main contribution to the city was the building of Westminster Abbey.

A dispute over his successor led to what's known as the Norman Conquest (Normans broadly being Vikings with shorter beards). When William the Conqueror won the watershed Battle of Hastings in 1066, he and his forces marched into London where he was crowned king. He built the White Tower (the core of the Tower of London), negotiated taxes with the merchants, and affirmed the city's independence and right to self-government.

The throne passed through various houses in the millennium or so since (the House of Windsor has warmed its cushion since 1910), but royal power has been concentrated in London since the 12th century.

From the 12th century to the late 15th century, London politics was largely taken up by a three-way power struggle between the monarchy, the church and city guilds.

The greatest threat to the burgeoning city was that of disease caused by unsanitary living conditions and impure drinking water. In 1348 rats on ships from Europe brought the bubonic plague, which wiped out a third of London's population of 100,000 over the following year.

Violence became commonplace in the hard times that followed. In 1381, miscalculating or just disregarding the mood of the nation, the king tried to impose a poll tax on everyone in the realm. Tens of thousands of peasants marched on London. Several ministers were murdered and many buildings razed before the so-called Peasants' Revolt ran its course. The ringleaders were executed, but there was no more mention of a poll tax (until Margaret Thatcher, not heeding the lessons of history, tried to introduce it in the 1980s).

Despite these setbacks, London was consolidated as the seat of law and government in the kingdom during the 14th century. An uneasy political compromise was reached between the factions, and the city expanded rapidly under the House of Tudor. The first recorded map of London was published in 1558, and John Stow produced the first comprehensive history of the capital in 1598.

The 'Great Plague' struck in 1665 and 100,000 Londoners perished by the time the winter cold arrested the epidemic. Just as the population considered a sigh of relief, another disaster struck.

The mother of all blazes, the Great Fire of 1666, virtually razed the place, destroying most of its medieval, Tudor and Jacobean architecture. One plus was that it created a blank canvas upon which master architect Christopher Wren could build his magnificent churches.

London's growth continued unabated and by 1700 it was Europe's largest city with 600,000 people. An influx of foreign workers brought expansion to the east and south, while those who could afford it headed to the more salubrious environs of the north and west, divisions that still largely shape London today.

Georgian London saw a surge in creativity in architecture, music and art with the likes of Dr Johnson, Handel, Gainsborough and Reynolds enriching the city's culture while Georgian architects fashioned an elegant new metropolis. At the same time the gap between the rich and poor grew ever wider, and lawlessness was rife.

LONDON IN…

Two Days

Start off in **Trafalgar Square** (p134) with a visit to the **National Gallery** (p134) and/or **National Portrait Gallery** (p135). Follow the Mall to the **Institute for Contemporary Arts** (p136), where art goes 20th century and you can refuel. Next stop is a photo or tour of **Buckingham Palace** (p137). Wander through **Green Park** (p137) for tea at the **Ritz** (p156) and a **West End show** (p171). On day two, delve into history at the **Tower of London** (p142) then meander over **Tower Bridge** (p143) for lunch riverside. Finish with **Shakespeare's Globe Theatre** (p144) and the **Tate Modern** (p144) before a dusk turn on the **London Eye** (p145) and dinner at the **Oxo Tower** (p163).

Four Days

Expand your mind at the **Victoria & Albert** (p146), **Science** (p146) and **Natural History Museums** (p146) and contract your wallet at **Harrods** (p176). Take in the **British Museum** (p139), nose around **Covent Garden** (p138) and **Soho** (p138) then hit the high notes at **Lucky Voice** (p173). Taste political might in **Westminster** (p135) before relaxing in **Hyde Park** (p147), boating on the Serpentine and dining in **Notting Hill** (p164). Head east to the **Geffrye Museum** (p149), grab an open-air bite in **Hoxton Square** (p162) then dance off your dinner at the **clubs** (p171) nearby.

One Week

A week gives you a great chance to explore the capital. Spend a Sunday in the East End with brunch at **Canteen** (p162) and a rifle through **Spitalfields Market** (p177), **Sunday (Up)market** (p177) and **Brick Lane Market** (p177). Visit the **Imperial War Museum** (p145) then follow the river to the **South Bank** (p144), **HMS Belfast** (p144), **Borough Market** (p177), **London Dungeon** (p144) and **City Hall** (p143). Spend an evening in **Bermondsey Street** (p169) and a night out in **Hoxton** and **Shoreditch** (p169). Head to Westminster for the **Houses of Parliament** (p136) and **Westminster Abbey** (p135) then explore the **City** (p141) and **St Paul's Cathedral** (p141). Take a boat to **Greenwich** (p150) for maritime history and time travel. Make the journey north for a tour around **Highgate Cemetery** (p149) and the welcome fresh air of **Hampstead Heath** (p149).

In 1837 the 18-year-old Victoria ascended the throne. During her long reign (1837–1901), London became the fulcrum of the expanding British Empire, which covered a quarter of the earth's surface. The Industrial Revolution saw the building of new docks and railways (including the first Underground line in 1863), while the Great Exhibition of 1851 showcased London to the world. The city's population mushroomed from just over two million to 6.6 million during Victoria's reign.

Road transport was revolutionised in the early 20th century when the first motor buses were introduced and replaced the horse-drawn versions that had trotted their trade since 1829.

Although London suffered relatively minor damage during WWI, it was devastated by the Luftwaffe in WWII when huge swaths of the centre and East End were totally flattened and 32,000 people were killed. Ugly housing and low-cost developments were hastily erected in postwar London, and immigrants from around the world flocked to the city and changed its character forever.

The latest major disaster to beset the capital was the great smog on 6 December 1952, when a lethal combination of fog, smoke and pollution descended on the city and killed some 4000 people.

Prosperity gradually returned, and the creative energy that had been bottled up in the postwar years was suddenly unleashed. London became the capital of cool in fashion and music in the 'swinging '60s'.

The party didn't last long, however, and London returned to the doldrums in the harsh economic climate of the 1970s. Recovery began – for business at least – under the iron fist of Margaret Thatcher, elected Britain's first woman prime minister in 1979. Her monetarist policy and determination to crush socialism sent unemployment skyrocketing and her term was marked by civil unrest.

London got its first true mayor in 2000 when feisty 'Red' Ken Livingstone swept to

victory. In a bid to improve transport, he introduced the controversial (but ultimately successful) congestion charge, and got the buses running on time. His axing of the much-loved Routemaster buses in 2005 has remained a much less popular move.

July 2005 was a roller-coaster month for London. Snatching victory from the jaws of Paris (the favourites), the city won its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games and celebrated with a frenzy of parties and flag-waving. The following day, joy turned to horror as suicide bombers struck on the tube and a bus, killing 56 people. Only two weeks later a second terrorist attack was thankfully foiled. But Londoners are not easily beaten and they immediately returned to the tube, defiant. As ever, the city now has its face firmly turned towards the future.

ORIENTATION

The city's main geographical feature is the murky Thames, a river that was sufficiently deep (for anchorage) and narrow (for bridging) to attract the Romans here in the first place. It divides the city roughly into north and south.

The 'square mile' of the City of London – the capital's financial district – is counted as one of London's 33 council-run boroughs and is referred to simply as 'the City' (look for the capital 'C'). The M25 ring road encompasses the 1572 sq km that is broadly regarded as Greater London.

London's Underground railway ('the tube') makes this enormous city relatively accessible. Most of the important sights, theatres and restaurants lie within the tube's Circle Line (colour-coded yellow), which encircles central London just north of the river.

Londoners commonly refer to areas by their postcode. The letters correspond to compass directions from the centre of London, approximately St Paul's Cathedral. EC means East Central, W means West and so on. The numbering system after the letters is less helpful.

Maps

The *London A-Z* series is a range of excellent maps and hand-held street atlases. Lonely Planet also publishes a *London City Map*.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Books for Cooks (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7221 1992; 4 Blenheim Cres W11; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) Does what it says on the tin.

Borders (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7292 1600; 203 Oxford St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Flagship of the huge chain.

Forbidden Planet (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 4179; 179 Shaftesbury Ave WC2; ⊖ Leicester Sq or Covent Garden) A trove of comics, sci-fi, horror and fantasy literature.

Foyle's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 5660; 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Venerable and respected independent store with a broad range, including Silver Moon, the women's literature specialist, and Ray's Jazz café.

Gay's the Word (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 7654; 66 Marchmont St WC1; ⊖ Russell Sq) Everything from advice on coming out, to gay and lesbian literature.

Grant & Cutler (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 2012; 55-57 Great Marlborough St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) The best foreign-language store in town.

Helter Skelter (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 1151; 4 Denmark St WC2; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Biographies, fanzines and rock literature.

Stanfords (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 1321; 12-14 Long Acre WC2; ⊖ Covent Garden) The granddaddy of travel bookstores.

Travel Bookshop (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 5260; 13 Blenheim Cres W11; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) The latest guidebooks, travel literature and antiquarian gems.

Waterstone's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7851 2400; 203-206 Piccadilly W1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) The best of this book-purveying giant with 5th View bar on the 5th floor (obviously).

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map pp120–1; ☎ 7723 6439; 1 Dorset Sq NW1; ⊖ Marylebone) Organises French-language classes, and social and cultural events.

British Council (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7930 8466; 10 Spring Gardens SW1; ⊖ Charing Cross) Can advise foreign students on educational opportunities in Britain.

Emergency

Police/Fire/Ambulance (☎ 999)

Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre (☎ 8683 3300)

Samaritans (☎ 08457 909 090)

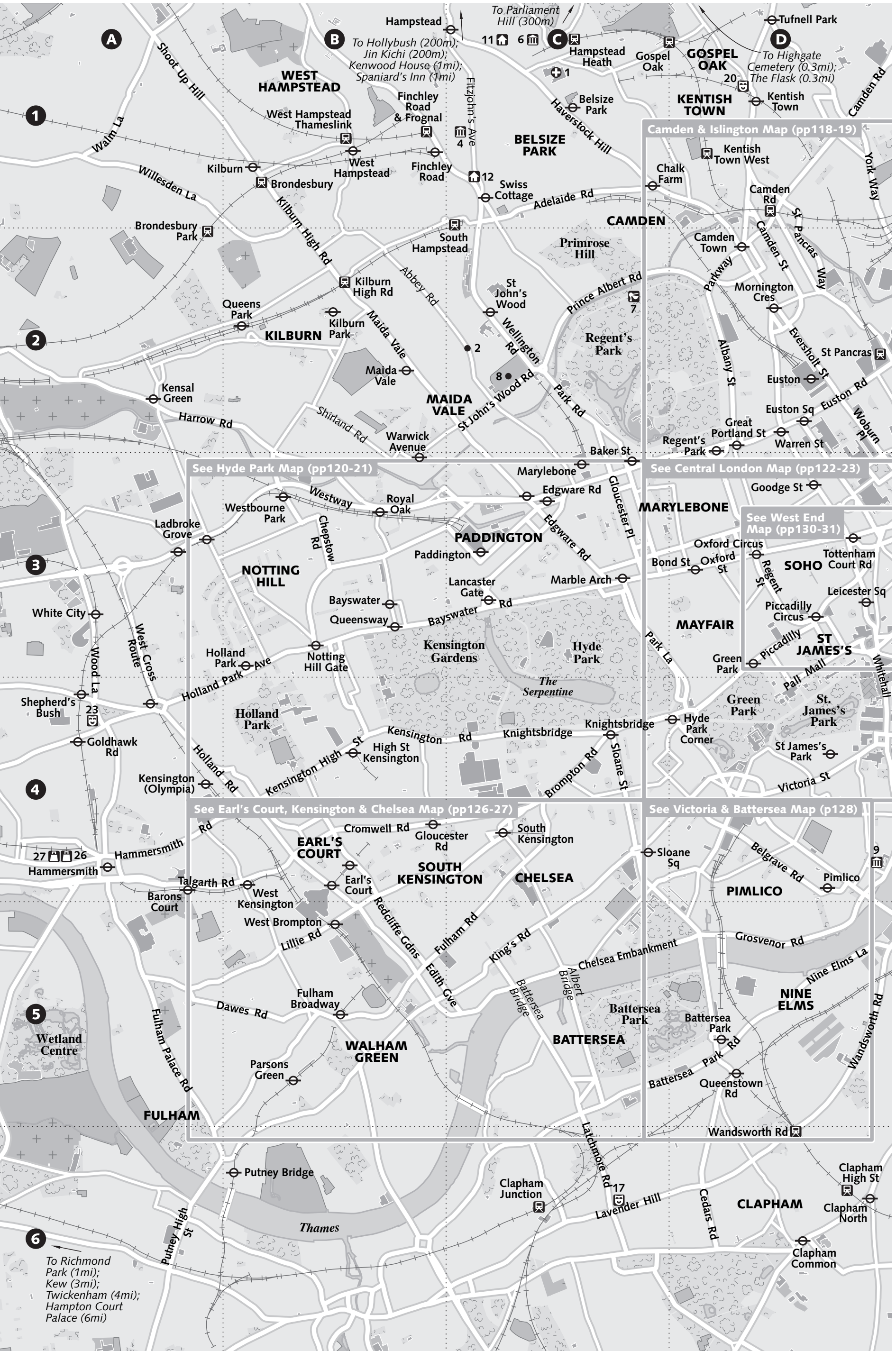
Internet Access

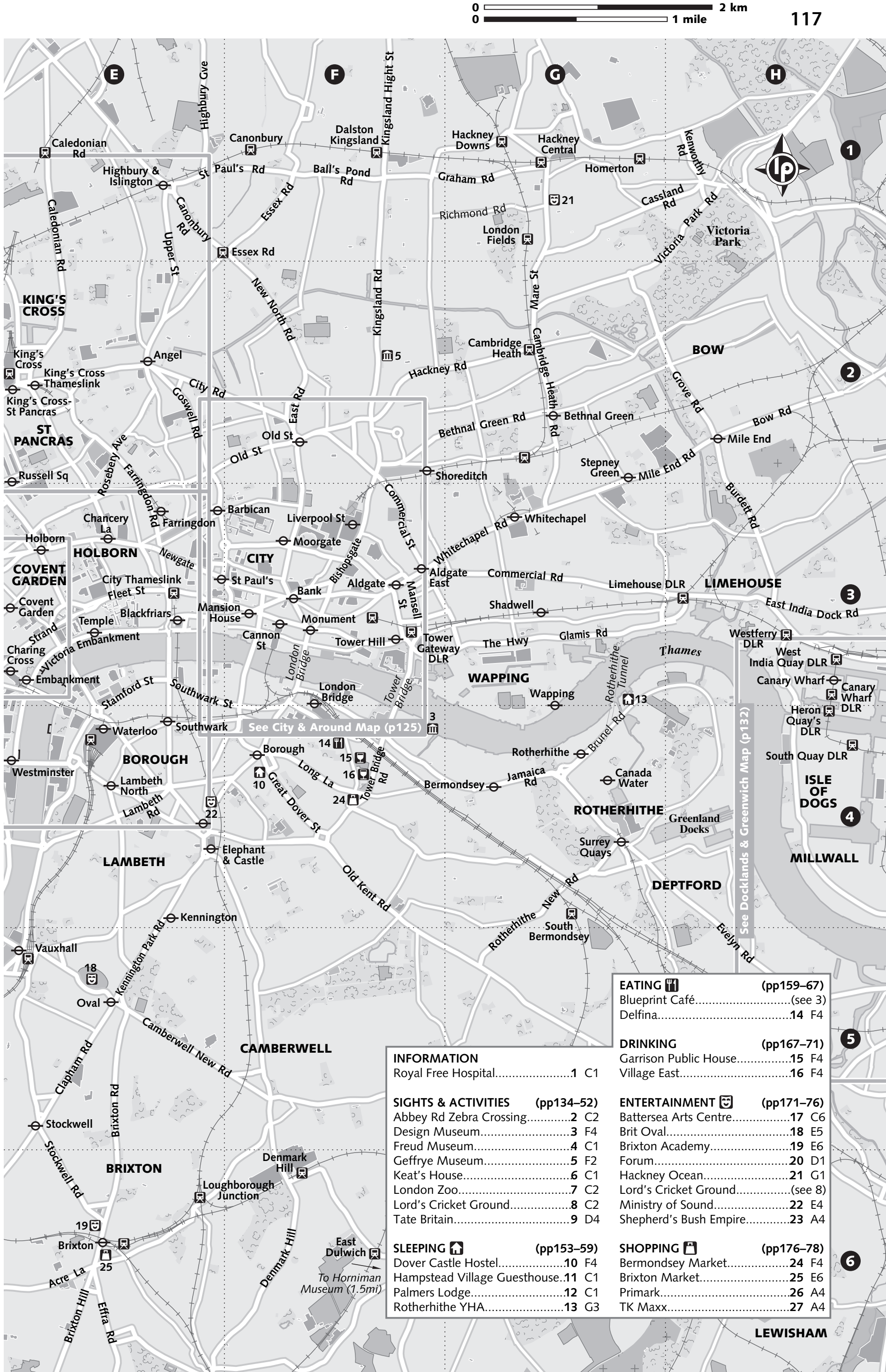
Cyberia (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7209 0984; 39 Whitfield St W1; ⊖ Goodge St)

easyInternetcafé (Map pp130-1; www.easy.com; 9-16 Tottenham Court Rd W1; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Branches throughout central London.

Internet Lounge (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7370 1734; 24A Earl's Court Gardens SW5; ⊖ Earl's Court) Also in Hammersmith and Tottenham Court Rd.

(Continued on page 133)


A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
6
Hampstead
To Parliament Hill (300m)
To Hollybush (200m); Jin Kichi (200m); Kenwood House (1mi); Spaniard's Inn (1mi)
11
6
Hampstead Heath
1
Gospel Oak
GOSPEL OAK
To Highgate Cemetery (0.3mi); The Flask (0.3mi)
20
Tufnell Park
Camden Rd
Shoot Up Hill
WEST HAMPSTEAD
Finchley Road & Frognal
West Hampstead Thameslink
Fitzjohn's Ave
4
Belsize Park
Haverstock Hill
BELSIZE PARK
KENTISH TOWN
Kentish Town
Walm La
Willesden La
Kilburn
West Hampstead
Finchley Road
12
Swiss Cottage
Adelaide Rd
Brondesbury
Camden & Islington Map (pp118-19)
Kentish Town West
Chalk Farm
Camden Rd
York Way
CAMDEN
Brondesbury Park
South Hampstead
Primrose Hill
Camden Town
Camden St
St Pancras Way
Kilburn High Rd
Parkway
Mornington Cres
Abbey Rd
Queens Park
Kilburn High Rd
St John's Wood
Prince Albert Rd
7
Kilburn Park
KILBURN
Maida Vale
Wellington Rd
2
Regent's Park
Albany St
Eversholt St
St Pancras
Maida Vale
8
St John's Wood Rd
Park Rd
Euston
Kensal Green
MAIDA VALE
Euston Sq
Euston Rd
Woburn Pl
Harrow Rd
Shirland Rd
Warwick Avenue
Great Portland St
Warren St
Regent's Park
Baker St
See Hyde Park Map (pp120-21)
Marylebone
See Central London Map (pp122-23)
Goodge St
Westway
Royal Oak
Westbourne Park
Chepstow Rd
Edgware Rd
Gloucester Pl
MARYLEBONE
Ladbroke Grove
PADDINGTON
See West End Map (pp130-31)
Edgware Rd
Oxford Circus
Tottenham Court Rd
NOTTING HILL
Paddington
Bond St
Oxford St
Regent St
SOHO
Lancaster Gate
Marble Arch
Bayswater
Bayswater Rd
Leicester Sq
White City
Queensway
Piccadilly Circus
MAYFAIR
Kensington Gardens
Hyde Park
Park La
ST JAMES'S
Holland Park
Holland Park Ave
Notting Hill Gate
Piccadilly
Green Park
Whitehall
West Cross Route
Wood La
The Serpentine
Pall Mall
Shepherd's Bush
23
Holland Park
Green Park
St. James's Park
Kensington Rd
Knightsbridge
Knightsbridge
Hyde Park Corner
Goldhawk Rd
High St Kensington
St James's Park
Kensington High St
Holland Rd
Brompton Rd
Sloane St
Kensington (Olympia)
Victoria St
See Earl's Court, Kensington & Chelsea Map (pp126-27)
See Victoria & Battersea Map (p128)
Cromwell Rd
Gloucester Rd
South Kensington
27
26
Hammersmith Rd
Hammersmith
EARL'S COURT
SOUTH KENSINGTON
CHELSEA
Sloane Sq
9
Belgrave Rd
Pimlico
Talgarth Rd
West Kensington
Earl's Court
PIMLICO
Barons Court
West Brompton
Redcliffe Gdns
Lillie Rd
Fulham Rd
King's Rd
Grosvenor Rd
Edith Gve
Chelsea Embankment
Albert Bridge
Battersea Bridge
Nine Elms La
NINE ELMS
Dawes Rd
Fulham Broadway
Battersea Park
Battersea Park
Wandsworth Rd
Wetland Centre
Fulham Palace Rd
WALHAM GREEN
BATTERSEA
Battersea Park Rd
Parsons Green
Queenstown Rd
FULHAM
Wandsworth Rd
Putney Bridge
Latchmere Rd
17
Clapham High St
Clapham Junction
Lavender Hill
Cedars Rd
CLAPHAM
Clapham North
Thames
Putney High St
Clapham Common
To Richmond Park (1mi); Kew (3mi); Twickenham (4mi); Hampton Court Palace (6mi)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3
4
5
6
Highbury Gve
Kingsland High St
Caledonian Rd
Canonbury
Dalston Kingsland
Hackney Downs
Hackney Central
Kenworthy Rd
Highbury & Islington
St Paul's Rd
Ball's Pond Rd
Graham Rd
Homerton
Cassland Rd
21
Caledonian Rd
Upper St
Canonbury Rd
Essex Rd
Essex Rd
Richmond Rd
London Fields
Victoria Park Rd
Victoria Park
Mare St
KING'S CROSS
New North Rd
Kingsland Rd
5
Cambridge Heath
Angel
Hackney Rd
BOW
King's Cross
King's Cross Thameslink
King's Cross-St Pancras
City Rd
Goswell Rd
East Rd
Cambridge Heath Rd
Grove Rd
ST PANCRAS
Old St
Old St
Bethnal Green Rd
Bethnal Green
Bow Rd
Mile End
Rosebery Ave
Farringdon Rd
Russell Sq
Shoreditch
Stepney Green
Mile End Rd
Burdett Rd
Barbican
Commercial St
Chancery La
Farringdon
Liverpool St
Whitechapel
Whitechapel Rd
Holborn
Moorgate
HOLBORN
Newgate
CITY
Bishopsgate
Aldgate East
Commercial Rd
Limehouse DLR
LIMEHOUSE
COVENT GARDEN
City Thameslink
St Paul's
Aldgate
Fleet St
Bank
Mansell St
Shadwell
Covent Garden
Blackfriars
Mansion House
Monument
East India Dock Rd
Temple
Strand
Cannon St
Tower Hill
Tower Gateway DLR
The Hwy
Glamis Rd
Westferry DLR
Victoria Embankment
Charing Cross
London Bridge
West India Quay DLR
Embankment
Stamford St
Southwark St
London Bridge
Tower Bridge
WAPPING
Rotherhithe Tunnel
Thames
Canary Wharf
Canary Wharf DLR
Wapping
13
Heron Quay's DLR
3
Waterloo
Southwark
See City & Around Map (p125)
See Docklands & Greenwich Map (p132)
14
Borough
BOROUGH
15
Rotherhithe
Brunel Rd
South Quay DLR
Westminster
Long La
16
Tower Bridge Rd
Lambeth North
10
Great Dover St
Bermondsey
Jamaica Rd
Canada Water
ISLE OF DOGS
24
Lambeth Rd
22
ROTHERHITHE
Greenland Docks
MILLWALL
Elephant & Castle
Surrey Quays
LAMBETH
Old Kent Rd
DEPTFORD
Rotherhithe New Rd
South Bermondsey
Kennington
Kennington Park Rd
Vauxhall
Evelyn St
18
Oval
Camberwell New Rd
CAMBERWELL
Clapham Rd
Brixton Rd
Stockwell
Stockwell Rd
BRIXTON
Denmark Hill
Loughborough Junction
East Dulwich
19
Brixton
25
Denmark Hill
To Horniman Museum (1.5mi)
Acre La
Brixton Hill
Effra Rd
LEWISHAM

INFORMATION		
Royal Free Hospital	1	C1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)		
Abbey Rd Zebra Crossing	2	C2
Design Museum	3	F4
Freud Museum	4	C1
Geffrye Museum	5	F2
Keat's House	6	C1
London Zoo	7	C2
Lord's Cricket Ground	8	C2
Tate Britain	9	D4

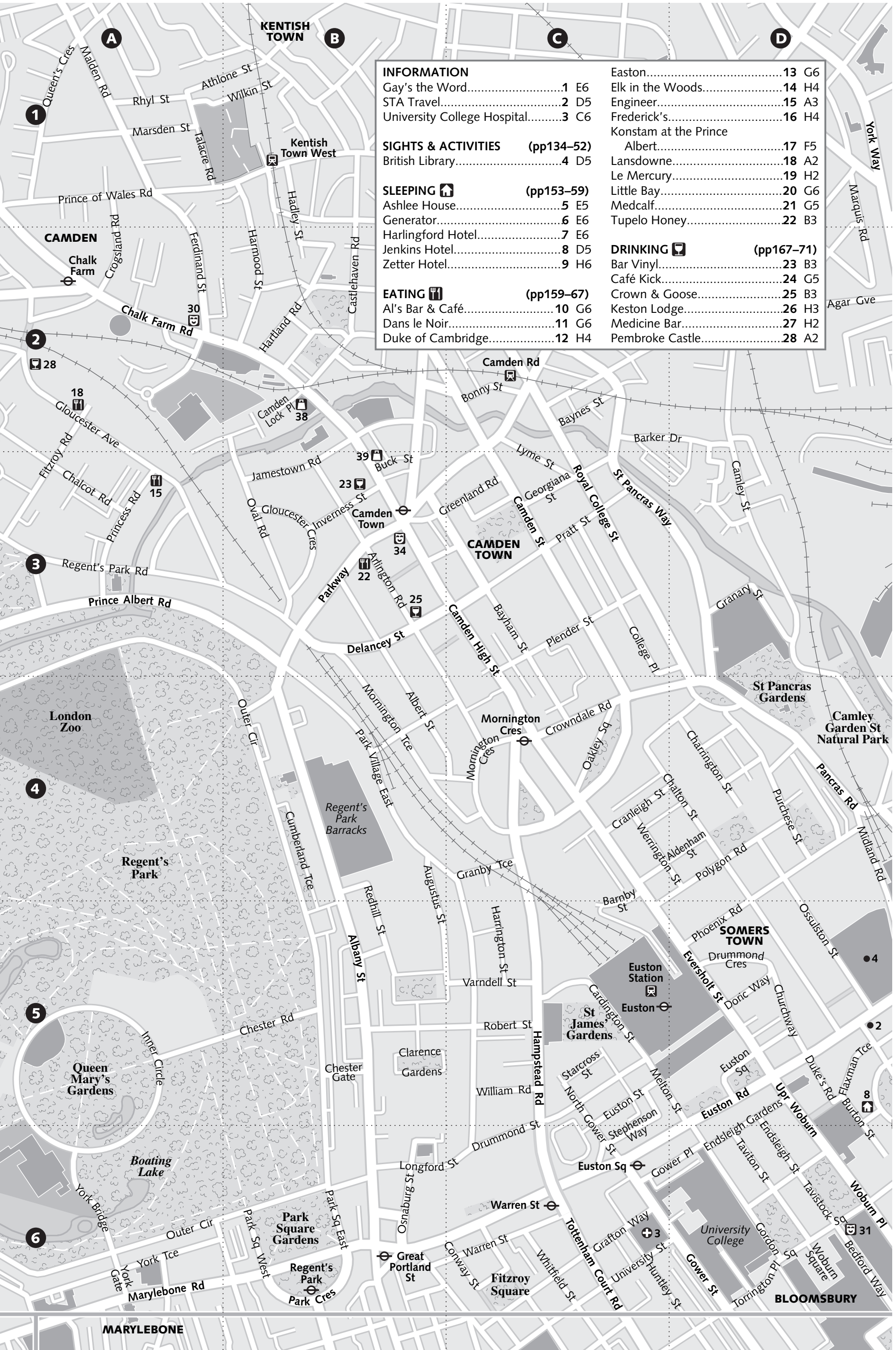
SLEEPING (pp153–59)		
Dover Castle Hostel	10	F4
Hampstead Village Guesthouse	11	C1
Palmers Lodge	12	C1
Rotherhithe YHA	13	G3

EATING (pp159–67)		
Blueprint Café	(see 3)	
Delfina	14	F4

DRINKING (pp167–71)		
Garrison Public House	15	F4
Village East	16	F4

ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)		
Battersea Arts Centre	17	C6
Brit Oval	18	E5
Brixton Academy	19	E6
Forum	20	D1
Hackney Ocean	21	G1
Lord's Cricket Ground	(see 8)	
Ministry of Sound	22	E4
Shepherd's Bush Empire	23	A4

SHOPPING (pp176–78)		
Bermondsey Market	24	F4
Brixton Market	25	E6
Primark	26	A4
TK Maxx	27	A4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KENTISH TOWN
Kentish Town West
CAMDEN
Chalk Farm
Queen's Cres
Malden Rd
Rhyl St
Athlone St
Wilkin St
Marsden St
Talacre Rd
Prince of Wales Rd
Crogsland Rd
Ferdinand St
Harmood St
Hadley St
Castlehaven Rd
Hartland Rd
Chalk Farm Rd
Camden Lock Pl
Gloucester Ave
Fitzroy Rd
Chalcot Rd
Princess Rd
Jamestown Rd
Buck St
Oval Rd
Gloucester Cres
Inverness St
Camden Town
Parkway
Arlington Rd
Regent's Park Rd
Prince Albert Rd
Delancey St
Camden Rd
Bonny St
Baynes St
Barker Dr
Lyme St
Greenland Rd
Georgiana St
CAMDEN TOWN
Camden St
Royal College St
St Pancras Way
Pratt St
Camley St
Bayham St
Plender St
College Pl
Camden High St
Granary St
St Pancras Gardens
Camley Garden St Natural Park
York Way
Marquis Rd
Agar Gve
London Zoo
Outer Cir
Mornington Tce
Albert St
Mornington Cres
Crowndale Rd
Oakley Sq
Charrington St
Chalton St
Cranleigh St
Werrington St
Aldenham St
Polygon Rd
Purchese St
Pancras Rd
Midland Rd
Ossulston St
Regent's Park
Regent's Park Barracks
Cumberland Tce
Park Village East
Augustus St
Redhill St
Albany St
Granby Tce
Harrington St
Barnby St
Phoenix Rd
SOMERS TOWN
Drummond Cres
Doric Way
Churchway
Euston Station
Euston
Eversholt St
Varndell St
Chester Rd
Inner Circle
Queen Mary's Gardens
Chester Gate
Clarence Gardens
Robert St
William Rd
Hampstead Rd
St James' Gardens
Cardington St
Starcross St
North Gower St
Euston St
Stephenson Way
Melton St
Euston Sq
Euston Rd
Duke's Rd
Flaxman Tce
Burton St
Upr Woburn Pl
Endsleigh Gardens
Endsleigh St
Taviton St
Gower Pl
Drummond St
Longford St
Boating Lake
York Bridge
Outer Cir
Park Sq West
Park Square Gardens
Park Sq East
Osnaburgh St
Warren St
Great Portland St
Conway St
Fitzroy Square
Whitfield St
Tottenham Court Rd
Grafton Way
University St
Huntley St
Gower St
University College
Gordon Sq
Torrington Pl
Tavistock Sq
Woburn Square
Bedford Way
Woburn Pl
BLOOMSBURY
York Tce
York Gate
Marylebone Rd
Regent's Park
Park Cres
MARYLEBONE
1
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INFORMATION

Gay's the Word	1	E6
STA Travel	2	D5
University College Hospital	3	C6

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

British Library	4	D5

SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Ashlee House	5	E5
Generator	6	E6
Harlingford Hotel	7	E6
Jenkins Hotel	8	D5
Zetter Hotel	9	H6

EATING (pp159–67)

Al's Bar & Café	10	G6
Dans le Noir	11	G6
Duke of Cambridge	12	H4
Easton	13	G6
Elk in the Woods	14	H4
Engineer	15	A3
Frederick's	16	H4
Konstam at the Prince Albert	17	F5
Lansdowne	18	A2
Le Mercury	19	H2
Little Bay	20	G6
Medcalf	21	G5
Tupelo Honey	22	B3

DRINKING (pp167–71)

Bar Vinyl	23	B3
Café Kick	24	G5
Crown & Goose	25	B3
Keston Lodge	26	H3
Medicine Bar	27	H2
Pembroke Castle	28	A2

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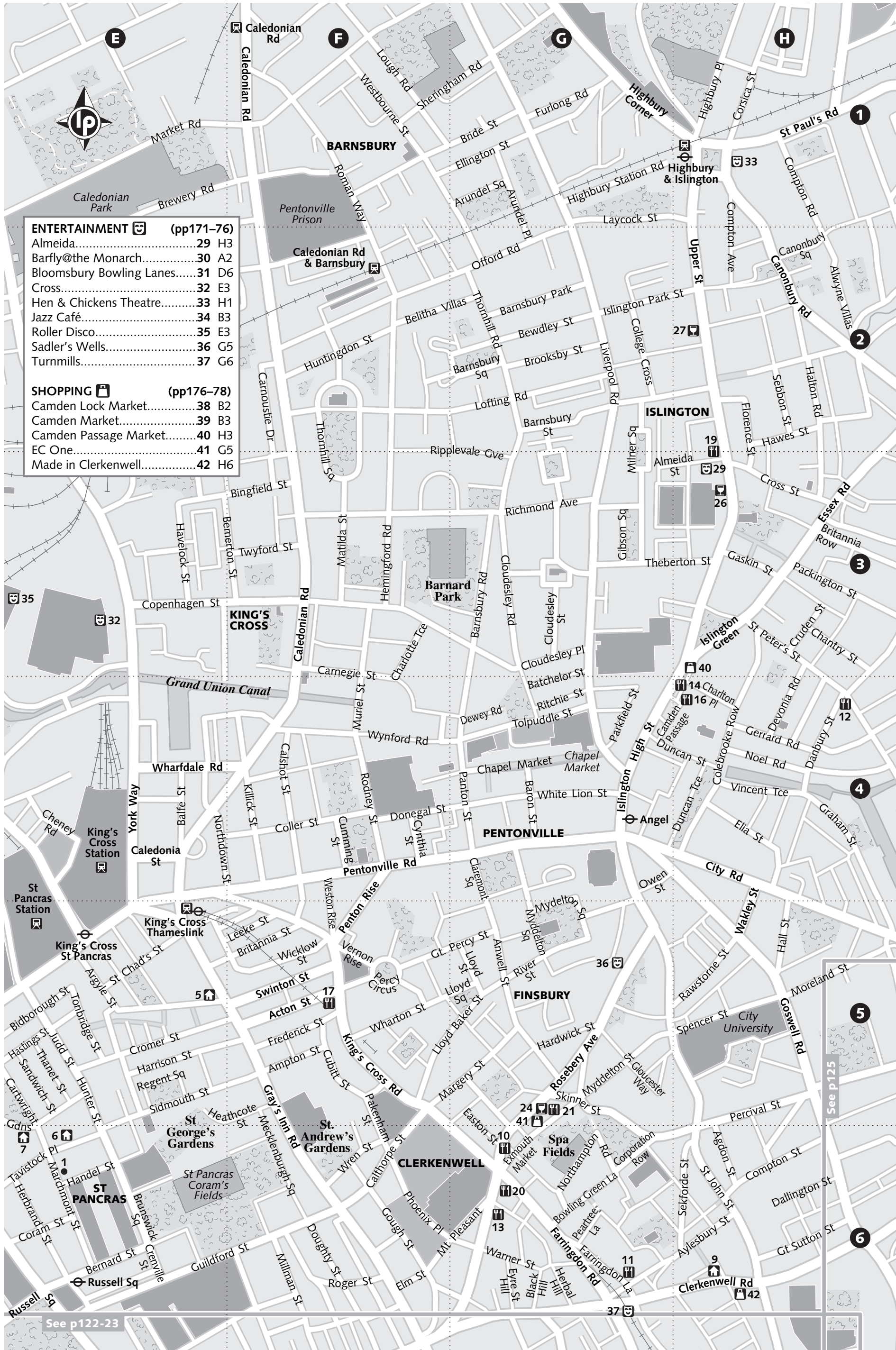
E
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1
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Caledonian Rd
Caledonian Park
Market Rd
Brewery Rd
Pentonville Prison
Caledonian Rd & Barnsbury
BARNSBURY
Lough Rd
Westbourne St
Sheringham Rd
Bride St
Ellington St
Furlong Rd
Highbury Corner
Highbury Pl
Corsica St
St Paul's Rd
Highbury & Islington
Highbury Station Rd
Laycock St
Arundel Sq
Arundel Pl
Offord Rd
Roman Way
Belitha Villas
Thornhill Rd
Barnsbury Park
Bewdley St
Brooksby St
Barnsbury Sq
Huntingdon St
Islington Park St
College Cross
Liverpool Rd
Upper St
Compton Ave
Compton Rd
Canonbury Rd
Canonbury Sq
Alwyne Villas
Lofting Rd
Barnsbury St
Thornhill Sq
Carnoustie Dr
Ripplevale Gve
ISLINGTON
Milner Sq
Almeida St
Florence St
Sebbon St
Halton Rd
Hawes St
Cross St
Essex Rd
Britannia Row
Bingfield St
Havelock St
Bemerton St
Twyford St
Matilda St
Hemingford Rd
Barnard Park
Barnsbury Rd
Cloudesley Rd
Cloudesley St
Richmond Ave
Gibson Sq
Theberton St
Gaskin St
Packington St
Copenhagen St
KING'S CROSS
Caledonian Rd
Charlotte Tce
Carnegie St
Muriel St
Cloudesley Pl
Batchelor St
Ritchie St
Tolpuddle St
Dewey Rd
Islington Green
St Peter's St
Cruden St
Chantry St
Charlton Pl
Camden Passage
Devonia Rd
Gerrard Rd
Colebrooke Row
Danbury St
Grand Union Canal
Wynford Rd
Parkfield St
Islington High St
Duncan St
Duncan Tce
Noel Rd
Vincent Tce
Wharfdale Rd
Caledonian Rd
Calshot St
Rodney St
Chapel Market
Baron St
White Lion St
Angel
Killick St
Balfe St
York Way
Northdown St
Coller St
Cumming St
Donegal St
Cynthia St
Panton St
PENTONVILLE
Elia St
Graham St
King's Cross Station
Caledonia St
Cheney Rd
Pentonville Rd
Owen St
City Rd
Wakley St
St Pancras Station
King's Cross St Pancras
King's Cross Thameslink
Leeke St
Britannia St
Wicklow St
Weston Rise
Penton Rise
Vernon Rise
Percy Circus
Claremont Sq
Gt Percy St
Lloyd St
Amwell St
River St
Myddelton Sq
Mydelton Sq
Hall St
Rawstorne St
Moreland St
Argyle St
St Chad's St
Swinton St
Acton St
Lloyd Sq
Lloyd Baker St
FINSBURY
Spencer St
City University
Goswell Rd
Bidborough St
Tonbridge St
Hastings St
Judd St
Thanet St
Sandwich St
Cromer St
Harrison St
Regent Sq
Frederick St
Ampton St
Wharton St
Cubitt St
King's Cross Rd
Hardwick St
Rosebery Ave
Myddelton St
Gloucester Way
Skinner St
Percival St
Cartwright Gdns
Hunter St
Sidmouth St
Heathcote St
St George's Gardens
Mecklenburgh Sq
Gray's Inn Rd
St. Andrew's Gardens
Pakenham St
Margery St
Easton St
Exmouth Market
Spa Fields
Northampton Rd
Corporation Row
Agdon St
Compton St
Tavistock Pl
Marchmont St
Handel St
ST PANCRAS
Herbrand St
Brunswick Sq
St Pancras Coram's Fields
Wren St
Calthorpe St
CLERKENWELL
Gough St
Phoenix Pl
Mt Pleasant
Rowling Green La
Peartree La
Farringdon La
Sekforde St
St John St
Dallington St
Aylesbury St
Gt Sutton St
Coram St
Bernard St
Grenville St
Guilford St
Doughty St
Millman St
Roger St
Elm St
Warner St
Eyre St Hill
Back Hill
Herbal Hill
Farringdon Rd
Clerkenwell Rd
Russell Sq
Russell Sq
See p122-23
See p125
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17
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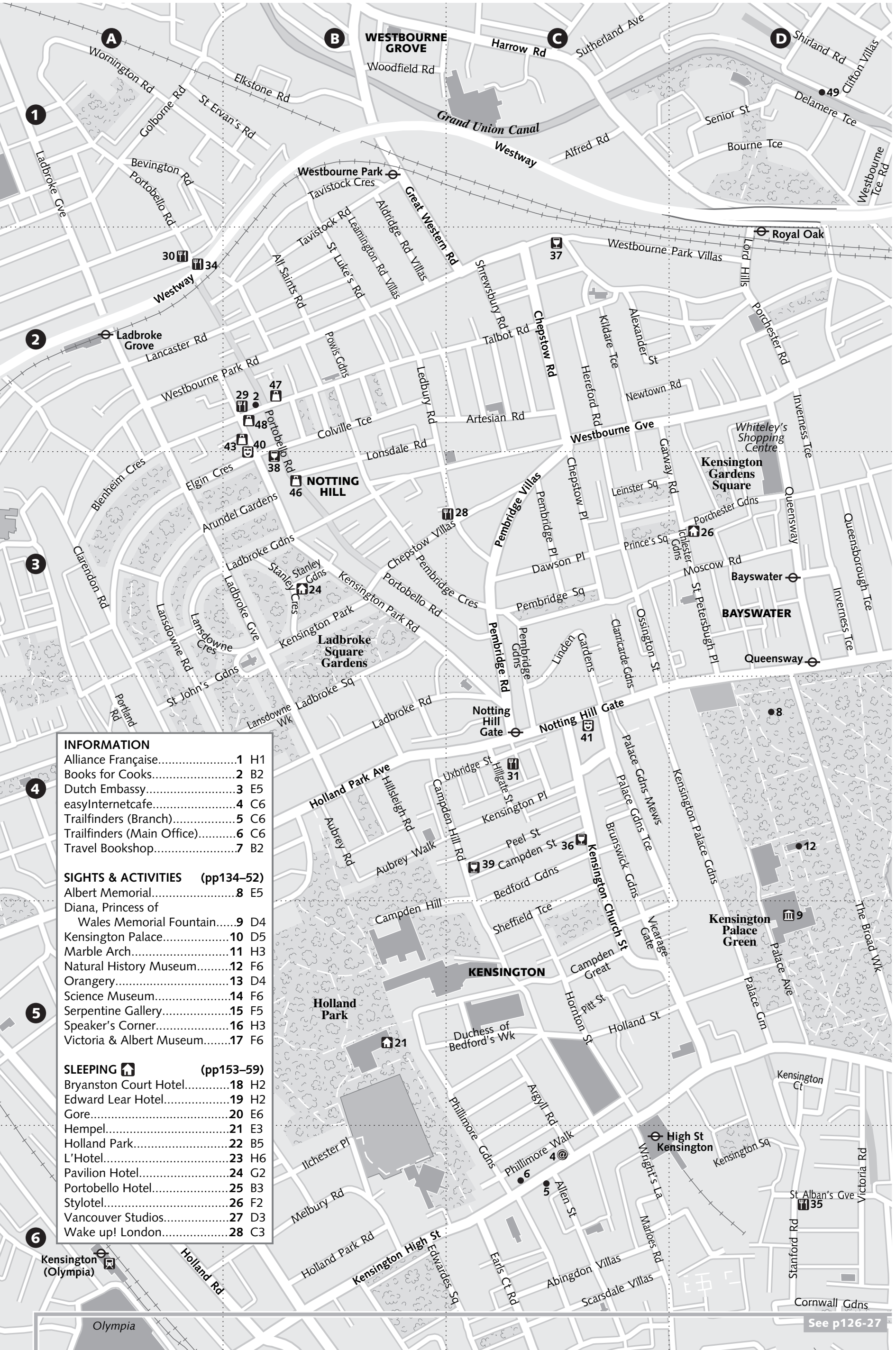
41
42

ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)

Almeida	29	H3
Barfly@the Monarch	30	A2
Bloomsbury Bowling Lanes	31	D6
Cross	32	E3
Hen & Chickens Theatre	33	H1
Jazz Café	34	B3
Roller Disco	35	E3
Sadler's Wells	36	G5
Turnmills	37	G6

SHOPPING (pp176–78)

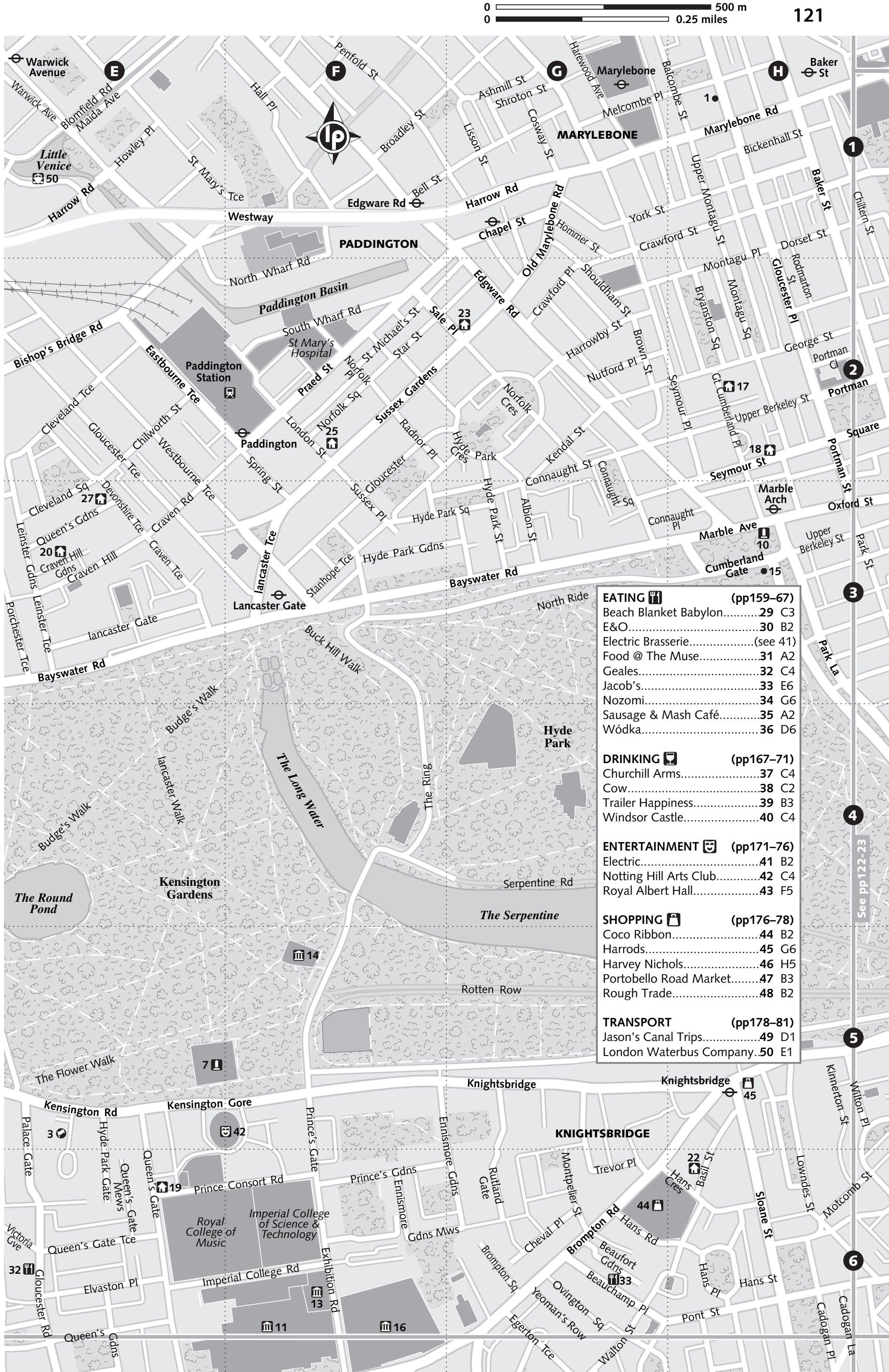
Camden Lock Market	38	B2
Camden Market	39	B3
Camden Passage Market	40	H3
EC One	41	G5
Made in Clerkenwell	42	H6


A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
6
WESTBOURNE GROVE
Woodfield Rd
Harrow Rd
Sutherland Ave
Shirland Rd
Clifton Villas
Delamere Tce
49
Wornington Rd
Elkstone Rd
Golborne Rd
St Ervan's Rd
Grand Union Canal
Westway
Alfred Rd
Senior St
Bourne Tce
Westbourne Tce Rd
Ladbroke Gve
Bevington Rd
Portobello Rd
Westbourne Park
Tavistock Cres
Tavistock Rd
Leamington Rd Villas
Aldridge Rd Villas
Great Western Rd
St Luke's Rd
All Saints Rd
Royal Oak
Lord Hills
Westbourne Park Villas
37
30
34
Shrewsbury Rd
Talbot Rd
Chepstow Rd
Hereford Rd
Kildare Tce
Alexander St
Porchester Rd
Ladbroke Grove
Lancaster Rd
Westbourne Park Rd
Powis Gdns
Ledbury Rd
Artesian Rd
Newtown Rd
Inverness Tce
29
2
47
48
43
40
38
46
Colville Tce
Lonsdale Rd
Westbourne Gve
Whiteley's Shopping Centre
NOTTING HILL
Blenheim Cres
Elgin Cres
Arundel Gardens
Clarendon Rd
28
Pembridge Villas
Pembridge Pl
Chepstow Pl
Leinster Sq
Garway Rd
Kensington Gardens Square
Porchester Gdns
26
Queensway
Queensborough Tce
Prince's Sq
Ilchester Gdns
Moscow Rd
Dawson Pl
Bayswater
BAYSWATER
Ladbroke Gdns
Stanley Gdns
Stanley Cres
24
Chepstow Villas
Kensington Park Rd
Pembridge Cres
Pembridge Sq
Linden Gardens
Clanricarde Gdns
Ossington St
St Petersburgh Pl
Inverness Tce
Lansdowne Rd
Lansdowne Cres
Kensington Park
Ladbroke Square Gardens
Pembridge Rd
Pembridge Gdns
Queensway
St John's Gdns
Portland Rd
Lansdowne Wk
Ladbroke Sq
Ladbroke Rd
Notting Hill Gate
41
8
Holland Park Ave
Hillsleigh Rd
Uxbridge St
Hillgate St
31
Kensington Pl
Palace Gdns Tce
Palace Gdns Mews
Kensington Palace Gdns
Aubrey Rd
Aubrey Walk
Campden Hill Rd
Peel St
Campden St
36
39
Bedford Gdns
Kensington Church St
Brunswick Gdns
12
Campden Hill
Sheffield Tce
Vicarage Gate
Kensington Palace Green
9
Palace Ave
The Broad Wk
KENSINGTON
Campden Great
Holland Park
21
Hornton St
Pitt St
Holland St
Duchess of Bedford's Wk
Palace Grn
Kensington Ct
Argyll Rd
Phillimore Gdns
Phillimore Walk
4
6
5
Allen St
High St Kensington
Kensington Sq
Wright's La
Ilchester Pl
Melbury Rd
Holland Park Rd
Kensington High St
Edwardes Sq
Earls Ct Rd
Abingdon Villas
Scarsdale Villas
Marloes Rd
St Alban's Gve
35
Stanford Rd
Victoria Rd
Cornwall Gdns
Holland Rd
Kensington (Olympia)
Olympia
See p126-27

INFORMATION		
Alliance Française	1	H1
Books for Cooks	2	B2
Dutch Embassy	3	E5
easyInternetcafe	4	C6
Trailfinders (Branch)	5	C6
Trailfinders (Main Office)	6	C6
Travel Bookshop	7	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	(pp134–52)	
Albert Memorial	8	E5
Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain	9	D4
Kensington Palace	10	D5
Marble Arch	11	H3
Natural History Museum	12	F6
Orangery	13	D4
Science Museum	14	F6
Serpentine Gallery	15	F5
Speaker's Corner	16	H3
Victoria & Albert Museum	17	F6

SLEEPING	(pp153–59)	
Bryanston Court Hotel	18	H2
Edward Lear Hotel	19	H2
Gore	20	E6
Hempel	21	E3
Holland Park	22	B5
L'Hotel	23	H6
Pavilion Hotel	24	G2
Portobello Hotel	25	B3
Stylotel	26	F2
Vancouver Studios	27	D3
Wake up! London	28	C3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Warwick Avenue
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Baker St
Warwick Ave
Blomfield Rd
Maida Ave
Little Venice
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Howley Pl
Hall Pl
Penfold St
St Mary's Tce
Broadley St
Ashmill St
Shroton St
Cosway St
Lisson St
Marylebone
Melcombe Pl
Balcombe St
1
MARYLEBONE
Marylebone Rd
Bickenhall St
Chiltern St
Harrow Rd
Bell St
Edgware Rd
Westway
PADDINGTON
Chapel St
Old Marylebone Rd
Homer St
York St
Crawford St
Dorset St
Upper Montagu St
Baker St
North Wharf Rd
Paddington Basin
South Wharf Rd
St Mary's Hospital
Sale Pl
23
Edgware Rd
Crawford Pl
Shouldham St
Montagu Pl
Bryanston Sq
Montagu Sq
Gloucester Pl
Rodmarton St
Bishop's Bridge Rd
Paddington Station
Eastbourne Tce
Praed St
St Michael's St
Star St
Norfolk Pl
Harrowby St
Nutford Pl
Brown St
George St
Portman Cl
17
Seymour Pl
Gt Cumberland Pl
Upper Berkeley St
Portman Sq
Cleveland Tce
Gloucester Tce
Chilworth St
Westbourne Tce
Paddington
London St
Norfolk Sq
25
Sussex Gardens
Radnor Pl
Norfolk Cres
Hyde Park Cres
Kendal St
18
Seymour St
Portman St
Cleveland Sq
27
Queen's Gdns
Devonshire Tce
Craven Rd
Spring St
Gloucester Sq
Sussex Pl
Hyde Park Sq
Hyde Park St
Albion St
Connaught St
Connaught Sq
Connaught Pl
Marble Arch
Oxford St
20
Craven Hill Gdns
Craven Hill
Craven Tce
Leinster Gdns
Lancaster Tce
Stanhope Tce
Hyde Park Gdns
Bayswater Rd
Marble Ave
10
Cumberland Gate
15
Upper Berkeley St
Park St
Porchester Tce
Leinster Tce
Lancaster Gate
lancaster Gate
Bayswater Rd
North Ride
Buck Hill Walk
Park La
Budge's Walk
lancaster Walk
The Long Water
The Ring
Hyde Park
The Round Pond
Kensington Gardens
Serpentine Rd
The Serpentine
14
Rotten Row
The Flower Walk
7
Knightsbridge
Knightsbridge
45
Kensington Rd
Kensington Gore
3
42
Palace Gate
Hyde Park Gate
Queen's Gate Mews
Queen's Gate
Prince's Gate
19
Prince Consort Rd
Royal College of Music
Imperial College of Science & Technology
Prince's Gdns
Ennismore Gdns
Ennismore Gdns Mws
Rutland Gate
Montpelier St
Trevor Pl
KNIGHTSBRIDGE
22
Basil St
Hans Cres
44
Sloane St
Kinnerton St
Wilton Pl
Lowndes St
Motcomb St
Victoria Gve
Queen's Gate Tce
32
Gloucester Rd
Elvaston Pl
Imperial College Rd
Exhibition Rd
13
11
16
Queen's Gdns
Brompton Sq
Cheval Pl
Brompton Rd
Hans Rd
Beaufort Gdns
33
Beauchamp Pl
Ovington Sq
Yeoman's Row
Egerton Tce
Walton St
Hans Pl
Hans St
Pont St
Cadogan Pl
Cadogan La
See pp122-23

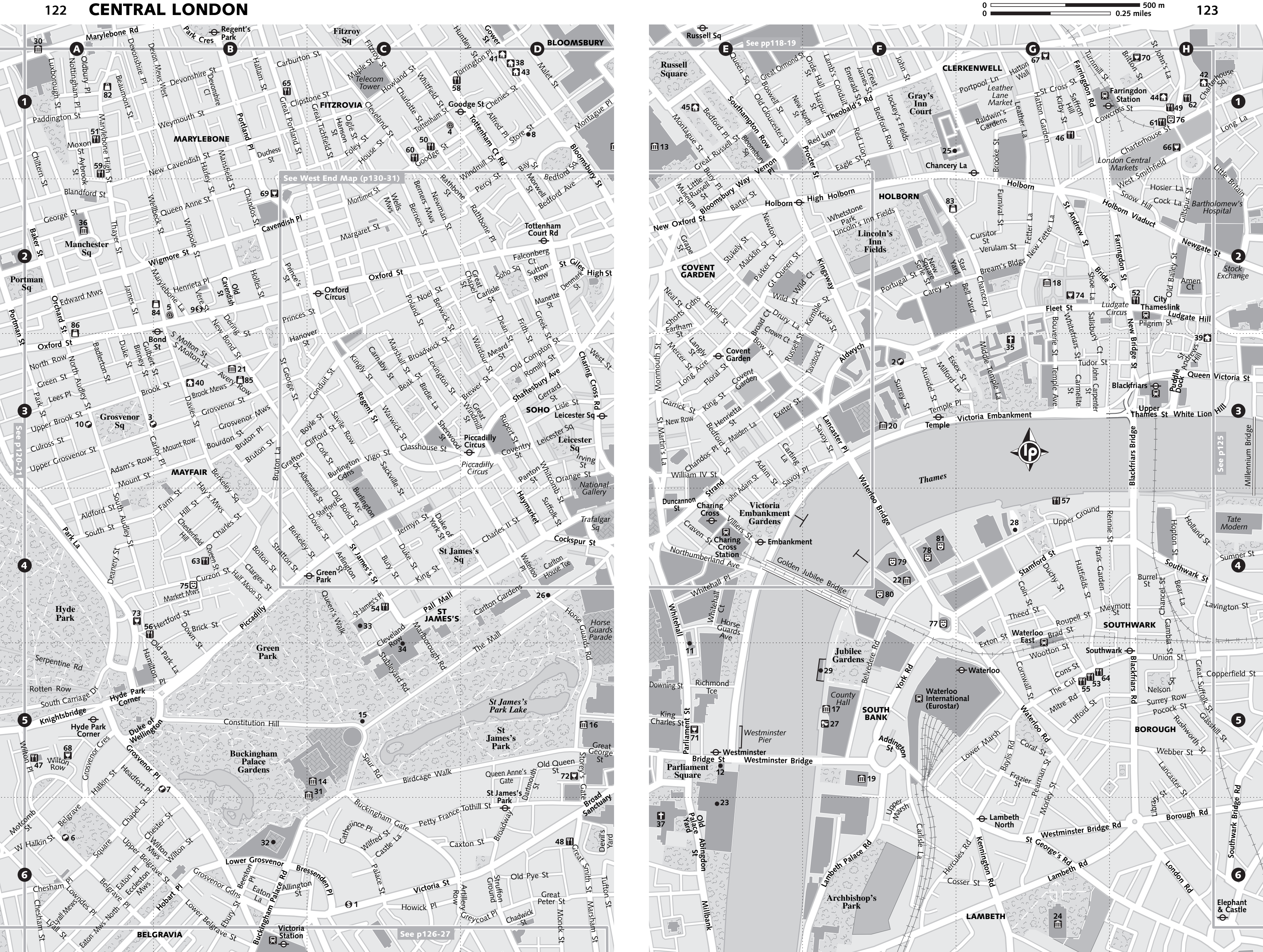
EATING	(pp159–67)	
Beach Blanket Babylon	29	C3
E&O	30	B2
Electric Brasserie	(see 41)	
Food @ The Muse	31	A2
Geales	32	C4
Jacob's	33	E6
Nozomi	34	G6
Sausage & Mash Café	35	A2
Wódka	36	D6

DRINKING	(pp167–71)	
Churchill Arms	37	C4
Cow	38	C2
Trailer Happiness	39	B3
Windsor Castle	40	C4

ENTERTAINMENT	(pp171–76)	
Electric	41	B2
Notting Hill Arts Club	42	C4
Royal Albert Hall	43	F5

SHOPPING	(pp176–78)	
Coco Ribbon	44	B2
Harrods	45	G6
Harvey Nichols	46	H5
Portobello Road Market	47	B3
Rough Trade	48	B2

TRANSPORT	(pp178–81)	
Jason's Canal Trips	49	D1
London Waterbus Company	50	E1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BLOOMSBURY
FITZROVIA
MARYLEBONE
MAYFAIR
SOHO
ST JAMES'S
BELGRAVIA
CLERKENWELL
HOLBORN
COVENT GARDEN
SOUTH BANK
SOUTHWARK
BOROUGH
LAMBETH
See West End Map (p130-31)
See pp118-19
See p120-21
See p125
See p126-27
Marylebone Rd
Regent's Park
Park Cres
Fitzroy Sq
Gower St
Huntley St
Torrington Pl
Chenies St
Malet St
Goodge St
Tottenham Ct Rd
Telecom Tower
Great Portland St
Carburton St
Clipstone St
Maple St
Howland St
Charlotte St
Whitfield St
Cleveland St
Great Titchfield St
Ogle St
Hanson St
Foley St
Store St
Alfred Pl
Bedford Sq
Bloomsbury St
Montague Pl
Windmill St
Percy St
Rathbone Pl
Bedford Ave
Morwell St
Bay St
Tottenham Court Rd
Oxford St
Oxford Circus
Margaret St
Mortimer St
Wells Mws
Berners St
Newman St
Falconberg Ct
Sutton Row
St Giles High St
Denmark St
Soho Sq
Carlisle St
Great Chapel St
Dean St
Frith St
Greek St
Manette St
Charing Cross Rd
Shaftesbury Ave
Old Compton St
Romilly St
Meard St
Wardour St
Berwick St
Broadwick St
Noel St
Poland St
Marshall St
Carnaby St
Kingly St
Beak St
Lexington St
Bridle La
Brewer St
Great Windmill St
Sherwood St
Glasshouse St
Piccadilly Circus
Rupert St
Coventry St
Gerrard St
Lisle St
Leicester Sq
Leicester Sq
Irving St
Orange St
National Gallery
Trafalgar Sq
Cockspur St
Haymarket
Panton St
Whitcomb St
Suffolk St
Charles II St
Waterloo Pl
Carlton House Tce
Pall Mall
St James's Sq
King St
Duke of York St
Jermyn St
Duke St
Bury St
St James's St
Arlington St
Green Park
Piccadilly
Berkeley St
Stratton St
Dover St
Albemarle St
Stafford St
Old Bond St
Burlington Arc
Burlington Gdns
Cork St
Clifford St
Savile Row
Vigo St
Sackville St
Grafton St
Boyle St
Regent St
Warwick St
Conduit St
St George St
Hanover Sq
Princes St
Prince's St
Bruton La
Bruton St
Bruton Pl
Bourdon St
Berkeley Sq
Hay's Mws
Charles St
Chesterfield Hill
Hill St
Farm St
Mount St
Mount Row
Carlos Pl
Adam's Row
South Audley St
Aldford St
South St
Deanery St
Park La
Queen St
Curzon St
Half Moon St
Clarges St
Bolton St
Market Mws
Hertford St
Brick St
Down St
Old Park La
Hamilton Pl
Hyde Park
Serpentine Rd
Rotten Row
South Carriage Dr
Hyde Park Corner
Knightsbridge
Duke of Wellington Pl
Grosvenor Pl
Constitution Hill
Green Park
Queen's Walk
St James's Pl
Cleveland Row
Stable Yard Rd
Marlborough Rd
The Mall
Carlton Gardens
Horse Guards Rd
Horse Guards Parade
St James's Park Lake
St James's Park
Buckingham Palace Gardens
Spur Rd
Birdcage Walk
Queen Anne's Gate
Old Queen St
Dartmouth St
Storey's Gate
Great George St
Broad Sanctuary
St James's Park
Petty France
Tothill St
Broadway
Caxton St
Buckingham Gate
Catherine Pl
Wilfred St
Castle La
Palace St
Lower Grosvenor Pl
Bressenden Pl
Allington St
Victoria St
Howick Pl
Artillery Row
Stufton Ground
Greycoat Pl
Old Pye St
Great Peter St
Chadwick St
Great Smith St
Marsham St
Tufton St
Monck St
Devil's Yard
Victoria Station
Buckingham Palace Rd
Eaton La
Beeston Pl
Grosvenor Gdns
Lower Belgrave St
Ebury St
Hobart Pl
Eccleston Mws
Eaton Pl
Belgrave Pl
Upper Belgrave St
Wilton St
Wilton Mws
Chester St
Chapel St
Belgrave Square
Halkin St
Headfort Pl
Grosvenor Cres
Wilton Row
Wilton Pl
Motcomb St
W Halkin St
Chesham Pl
Chesham St
Lowndes St
Lyall Mews
Lyall St
Eaton Mws North
Upper Grosvenor St
Culross St
Upper Brook St
Grosvenor Sq
Grosvenor St
Grosvenor Mws
Brook St
Brook Mews
Avery Row
Lees Pl
Green St
North Row
Park St
North Audley St
Balderton St
Duke St
Binney St
Gilbert St
Davies St
South Molton St
South Molton La
Bond St
Oxford St
Edward Mws
Orchard St
Portman St
Portman Sq
James St
Marylebone La
Henrietta Pl
Vere St
Old Cavendish St
Dering St
New Bond St
Holles St
Cavendish Pl
Wigmore St
Welbeck St
Wimpole St
Harley St
Queen Anne St
Chandos St
Mansfield St
Portland Pl
Duchess St
New Cavendish St
Weymouth St
Devonshire St
Devonshire Cl
Devon Mews West
Devonshire Pl
Beaumont St
Hallam St
Manchester Sq
George St
Baker St
Blandford St
Thayer St
Aybrook St
Moxon St
Marylebone High St
Chiltern St
Paddington St
Luxborough St
Oldbury Pl
Nottingham Pl
Russell Sq
Russell Square
Queen Sq
Great Ormond St
Boswell St
Old Gloucester St
Southampton Row
Bedford Pl
Montague St
Great Russell St
Bury Pl
Little Russell St
Museum St
Bloomsbury Way
Vernon Pl
Orde Hall St
Harpur St
New North St
Lamb's Conduit St
Emerald St
James St
Great James St
Theobald's Rd
Red Lion Sq
Red Lion St
Eagle St
Procter St
Bedford Row
Jockey's Fields
John St
Gray's Inn Court
Chancery La
High Holborn
Holborn
New Oxford St
Barter St
Grape St
Whetstone Park
Lincoln's Inn Fields
Lincoln's Inn Fields
Newton St
Stukely St
Macklin St
Parker St
Gt Queen St
Wild Ct
Wild St
Kingsway
Drury La
Kemble St
Kean St
Portugal St
Carey St
New Square
Serle St
Star Yard
Bell Yard
Chancery La
Cursitor St
Verulam St
Bream's Bldgs
Fetter La
New Fetter La
Furnival St
Brooke St
Leather La
Hatton Garden
Kirby St
Saffron Hill
St Cross St
Portpool Ln
Leather Lane Market
Baldwin's Gardens
Hatton Wall
Farringdon Rd
Farringdon Station
Farringdon
Cowcross St
Turnmill St
Britton St
St John's La
Charterhouse Sq
Long La
Charterhouse St
London Central Markets
West Smithfield
Little Britain
Hosier La
Snow Hill
Cock La
Giltspur St
Bartholomew's Hospital
Holborn Viaduct
St Andrew St
Farringdon St
Newgate St
Old Bailey St
Amen Ct
Stock Exchange
Shoe La
Bride St
City Thameslink
Ludgate Circus
Ludgate Hill
Pilgrim St
Fleet St
Bouverie St
Whitefriars St
Salisbury Ct
Tudor St
Temple Ave
Carmelite St
John Carpenter St
New Bridge St
Blackfriars
Puddle Dock
St Andrew's Hill
Queen Victoria St
Upper Thames St
White Lion Hill
Middle Temple La
Essex St
Milford La
Arundel St
Surrey St
Temple Pl
Temple
Victoria Embankment
Aldwych
Strand
Lancaster Pl
Savoy St
Savoy Pl
Carting La
Exeter St
Tavistock St
Russell St
Bow St
Crown Ct
Broad Ct
Endell St
Neal St
Shorts Gdns
Earlham St
Langley St
Mercer St
Long Acre
Floral St
Covent Garden
Covent Garden
Monmouth St
Garrick St
King St
Henrietta St
New Row
Bedford St
Maiden La
Chandos Pl
St Martin's La
William IV St
Adam St
John Adam St
Duncannon St
Charing Cross
Charing Cross Station
Villiers St
Craven St
Northumberland Ave
Embankment
Victoria Embankment Gardens
Golden Jubilee Bridge
Waterloo Bridge
Thames
Blackfriars Bridge
Millennium Bridge
Tate Modern
Hopton St
Holland St
Sumner St
Southwark St
Bear La
Burrel St
Lavington St
Rennie St
Paris Garden
Hatfields St
Meymott St
Upper Ground
Stamford St
Duchy St
Coin St
Theed St
Roupell St
Brad St
Waterloo East
Exton St
Wootton St
Southwark
Union St
Chancel St
Gambia St
Copperfield St
Great Suffolk St
Glasshill St
Nelson Sq
Surrey Row
Pocock St
Rushworth St
Webber St
Lancaster St
Library St
Borough Rd
Southwark Bridge Rd
Elephant & Castle
London Rd
Cons St
The Cut
Mitre Rd
Ufford St
Cornwall Rd
Waterloo Rd
Coral St
Baylis Rd
Lower Marsh
Frazier St
Pearman St
Morley St
Waterloo
Waterloo International (Eurostar)
Addington St
York Rd
Belvedere Rd
Jubilee Gardens
County Hall
Westminster Pier
Westminster Bridge
Westminster Bridge Rd
Lambeth North
St George's Rd
Kennington Rd
Hercules Rd
Cosser St
Lambeth Rd
Lambeth Palace Rd
Carlisle La
Upper Marsh
Archbishop's Park
Whitehall
Whitehall Ct
Horse Guards Ave
Richmond Tce
Downing St
King Charles St
Parliament St
Westminster
Bridge St
Parliament Square
Old Palace Yard
Abingdon St
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CENTRAL LONDON (p122–23)

INFORMATION

American Express	1	C6
Australian High Commission	2	F3
Canadian High Commission	3	A3
Cyberia	4	C1
easyInternetcafe	5	B2
German Embassy	6	A6
Irish Embassy	7	B5
STA Travel	8	D1
Thomas Cook	(see 1)	
Thomas Cook Branch	9	B2
US Embassy	10	A3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

Banqueting House	11	E5
Big Ben	12	E5
British Museum	13	E1
Buckingham Palace	14	C5
Buckingham Palace Ticket Office (Summer Only)	15	C5
Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms	16	D5
Dalí Universe	17	F5
Dr Johnson's House	18	G2
Florence Nightingale Museum	19	F5
Gilbert Collection	20	F3
Handel House Museum	21	B3
Hayward Gallery	22	F4
Hermitage Rooms	(see 20)	
Houses of Parliament	23	E6
Imperial War Museum	24	G6
Inns of Court	25	F1
Institute of Contemporary Arts	26	D4
London Aquarium	27	F5
London Bicycle Tour Company	28	G4
London Duck Tours Departure Point	(see 27)	
London Eye	29	F5
London Planetarium	(see 30)	
Madam Tussaud's	30	A1
Queen's Gallery	31	C5
Royal Mews	32	B6
Spencer House	33	C4
St James's Palace	34	C5
Temple Church	35	G3
Wallace Collection	36	A2
Westminister Abbey	37	E6

SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Arran House Hotel	38	D1
City of London YHA	39	H3
Claridges	40	B3
Hotel Cavendish	41	D1
Malmaison	42	H1
Ridgemount Hotel	43	D1
Rookery	44	H1
St Margaret's Hotel	45	E1

EATING (pp159–67)

Bleeding Heart Restaurant & Bistro	46	G1
Boxwood Café	47	A5
Cinnamon Club	48	D6
Greenery	49	H1
ICCo	50	C1
La Fromagerie Café	51	A1
Leon	52	H2
Livebait	53	G5
Luciano	54	C4
Mesón Don Felipe	55	G5
Nobu	56	A4
Oxo Tower Restaurant & Brasserie	57	G4
Planet Organic	58	C1
Providores	59	A1
Salt Yard	60	C1
Smiths of Smithfields	61	H1
St John	62	H1
Tamarind	63	B4
Tas	64	G5
Villandry	65	B1

DRINKING (pp167–71)

Cock Tavern	66	H1
Deux Beers	67	G1
Grenadier	68	A5
Heights	69	B2
Jerusalem Tavern	70	H1
Red Lion	71	E5
Westminster Arms	72	D5
Windows Restaurant & Bar	73	A4
Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese	74	G2

ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)

Curzon	75	D2
Fabric	76	H1
London IMAX	77	F4
National Film Theatre	78	F4
Purcell Room	(see 79)	
Queen Elizabeth Hall	79	F4
Royal Festival Hall	80	F4
Royal National Theatre	81	F4

SHOPPING (pp176–78)

Cath Kidston	82	A1
Giles by Giles Deacon	(see 86)	
London Silver Vaults	83	F2
Mulberry	84	B2
Paul Smith Sale Shop	85	B3
Selfridges	86	A2

CITY & AROUND (p125)

INFORMATION

American Express	1	A4
Corporation of London Information Centre	2	A4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

Bank of England Museum	3	B4
Barbican	4	B3
Britain at War Experience	5	C6
City Hall	6	D6
Guildhall	7	B4
HMS Belfast	8	C5
London Dungeon	9	B6
Monument	10	B5
Museum of London	11	A3
Old Operating Theatre Museum & Herb Garret	12	B6
St Katharine Docks	13	D5
St Paul's Cathedral	14	A4
Shakespeare's Globe & Exhibition	15	A5
Southwark Cathedral	16	B6
Tate Modern	17	A5
Tower of London	18	D5
White Cube	19	C1

SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Barbican YMCA	20	A2
St Christopher's Village	21	B6
Southwark Rose Hotel	22	A6
Threadneedles	23	B4

EATING (pp159–67)

Brick Lane Beigel Bake	24	D2
Canteen	25	D3
Fifteen	26	B1
Hoxton Apprentice	27	C1
Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen	28	C1
Konditor & Cook	29	B6
Le Taj	30	D2
Real Greek	31	C1
Stoney Street Café	32	B6
Story Deli	33	D2

DRINKING (pp167–71)

Anchor	34	B5
Bar Music Hall	35	C1
Cantaloupe	36	C1
Drunken Monkey	37	C2
George Inn	38	B6
Grapeshots	39	D3
Jamaica Wine House	40	B4
Loungelover	41	D2
Old Blue Last	42	C2
Sosho	43	B2
T Bar	44	D2
Ten Bells	45	D3
Vertigo 42	46	C4

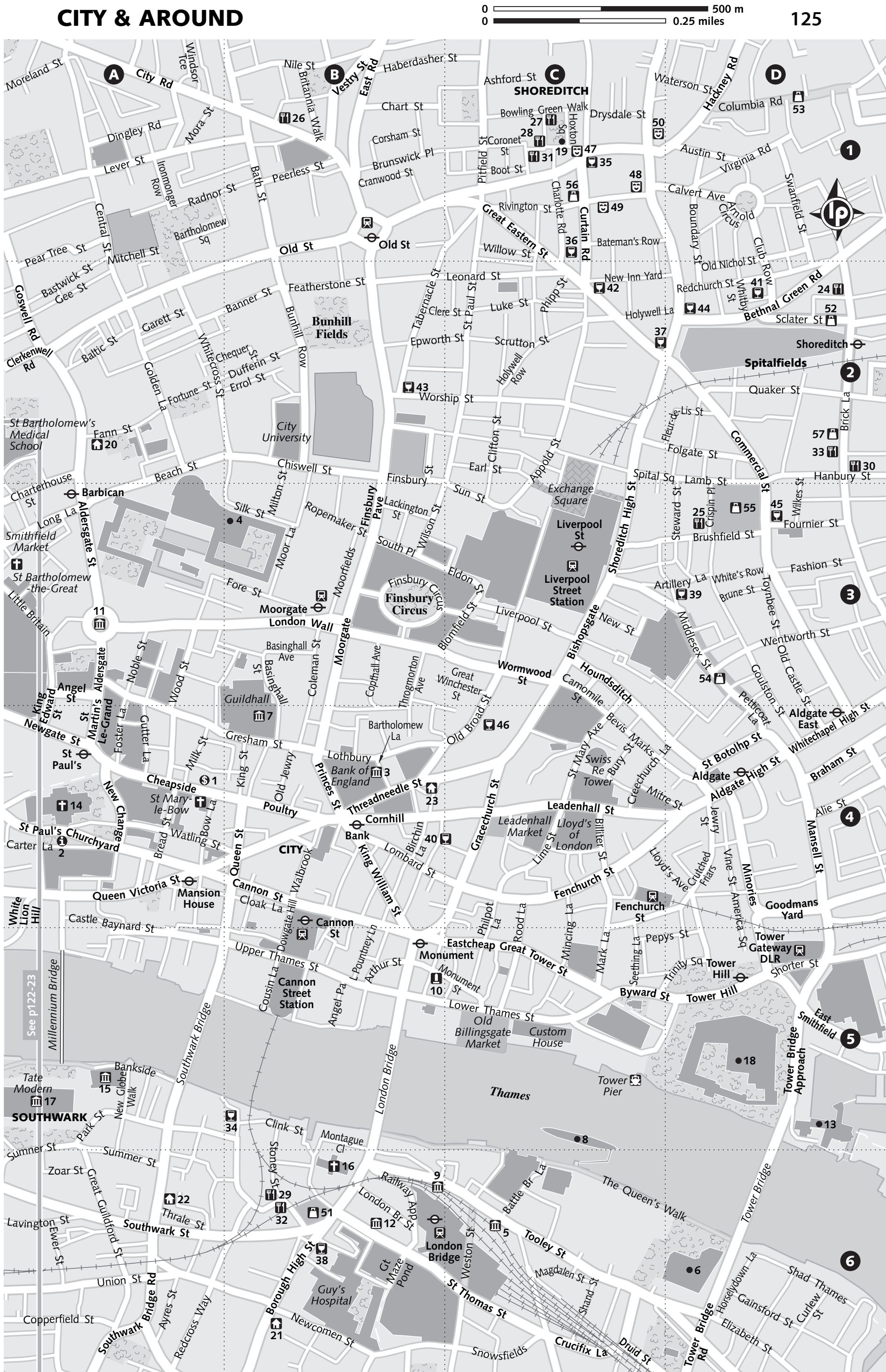
ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)

333	47	C1
Barbican Centre	(see 4)	
Cargo	48	C1
Comedy Café	49	C1
Herbal	50	C1

SHOPPING (pp176–78)

Borough Market	51	B6
Brick Lane Market	52	D2
Columbia Rd Flower Market	53	D1
Petticoat Lane Market	54	D3
Spitalfields Market	55	D3
Start	56	C1
Sunday (Up)Market	57	D2

CITY & AROUND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SHOREDITCH
City Rd
Old St
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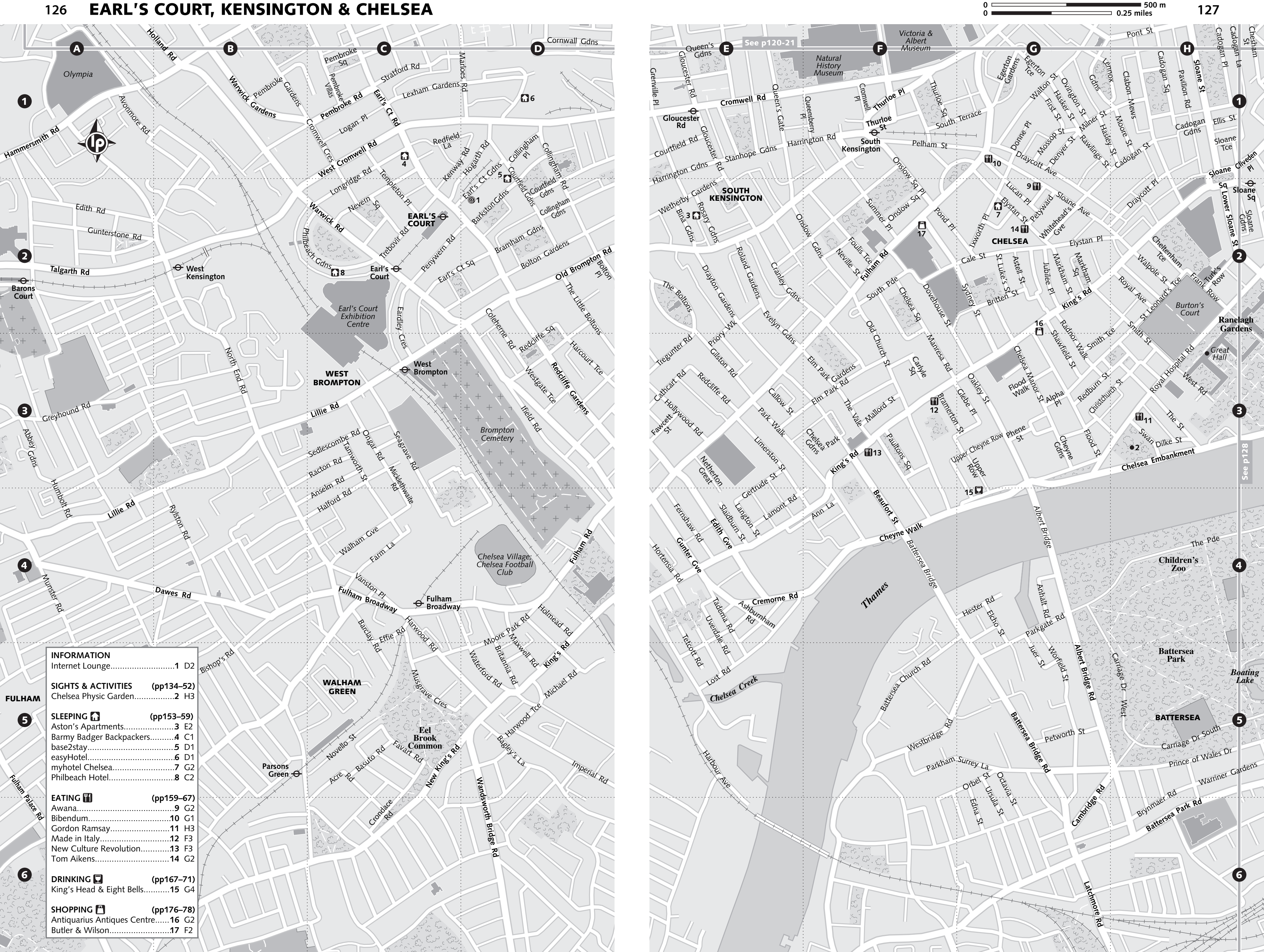
City University
Barbican
Liverpool St
Liverpool Street Station
Finsbury Circus
Exchange Square
Moorgate
London Wall
Guildhall
Bank of England
Bank
CITY
Cornhill
Threadneedle St
Cheapside
Poultry
St Paul's
St Paul's Churchyard
Mansion House
Cannon St
Cannon Street Station
Monument
Leadenhall Market
Lloyd's of London
Swiss Re Bury Tower
Fenchurch St
Tower Hill
Tower Gateway DLR
Aldgate
Aldgate East
Whitechapel High St
Commercial St
Bishopsgate
Houndsditch
Great Eastern St
Old Billingsgate Market
Custom House
Thames
Tower Pier
The Queen's Walk
Tower Bridge
Tower Bridge Approach
London Bridge
Southwark Bridge
Millennium Bridge
See p122-23
Tate Modern
SOUTHWARK
Bankside
New Globe Walk
Borough High St
Guy's Hospital
Tooley St
St Thomas St
London Bridge
Goswell Rd
Clerkenwell Rd
Aldersgate St
St Bartholomew's Medical School
Smithfield Market
St Bartholomew the-Great
Little Britain
Queen Victoria St
Upper Thames St
Lower Thames St
Great Tower St
Eastcheap
King William St
Gracechurch St
Minories
Mansell St
East Smithfield
Goodmans Yard
Fenchurch St
Hackney Rd
Columbia Rd
Bethnal Green Rd
Brick La
Hanbury St
Fournier St
Wentworth St
Middlesex St
Hoxton Sq
Curtain Rd
Worship St
Sun St
Finsbury Pavement
Moorfields
Wormwood St
Camomile St
Leadenhall St
Southwark St
Southwark Bridge Rd
Union St
Great Guildford St
Borough Market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Olympia
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Holland Rd
Warwick Gardens
Pembroke Gardens
Pembroke Sq
Pembroke Villas
Pembroke Rd
Earl's Ct Rd
Stratford Rd
Lexham Gardens
Marloes Rd
Cornwall Gdns
Logan Pl
Cromwell Cres
West Cromwell Rd
Longridge Rd
Nevern Sq
Templeton Pl
Redfield La
Kenway Rd
Hogarth Rd
Earl's Ct Gdns
Collingham Pl
Collingham Rd
Courtfield Gdns
Collingham Gdns
Barkston Gdns
Warwick Rd
Philbeach Gdns
Trebovir Rd
EARL'S COURT
Earl's Court
Penywern Rd
Earl's Ct Sq
Bramham Gdns
Bolton Gardens
Old Brompton Rd
Bolton Pl
The Little Boltons
Edith Rd
Gunterstone Rd
Talgarth Rd
West Kensington
Barons Court
Earl's Court Exhibition Centre
Eardley Cres
West Brompton
WEST BROMPTON
Coleherne Rd
Redcliffe Sq
Harcourt Tce
Westgate Tce
Redcliffe Gardens
Ifield Rd
Brompton Cemetery
North End Rd
Lillie Rd
Greyhound Rd
Abbey Gdns
Sedlescombe Rd
Tamworth St
Ongar Rd
Seagrave Rd
Racton Rd
Anselm Rd
Halford Rd
Micklethwaite Rd
Humbolt Rd
Rylston Rd
Walham Gve
Farm La
Chelsea Village; Chelsea Football Club
Fulham Rd
Munster Rd
Dawes Rd
Vanston Pl
Fulham Broadway
Fulham Broadway
Barclay Rd
Effie Rd
Harwood Rd
Moore Park Rd
Maxwell Rd
Britannia Rd
Holmead Rd
Waterford Rd
King's Rd
Michael Rd
Bishop's Rd
WALHAM GREEN
Musgrave Cres
Eel Brook Common
Harwood Tce
Bagley's La
Imperial Rd
FULHAM
Parsons Green
Novello St
Basuto Rd
Favart Rd
New King's Rd
Acre Rd
Crondace Rd
Wandsworth Bridge Rd
Fulham Palace Rd
See p120-21
Queen's Gdns
Gloucester Rd
Grenville Pl
Natural History Museum
Victoria & Albert Museum
Pont St
Cadogan Sq
Cadogan Pl
Cadogan La
Chesham St
Cromwell Rd
Queen's Gate
Queensberry Pl
Cromwell Pl
Thurloe Pl
Thurloe Sq
Thurloe St
South Terrace
Egerton Gardens
Egerton Tce
Walton St
Ovington St
Lennox Gdns
Clabon Mews
Pavilion Rd
Sloane St
Gloucester Rd
Courtfield Rd
Harrington Gdns
Stanhope Gdns
Harrington Rd
South Kensington
Pelham St
Donne Pl
Mossop St
Hasker St
First St
Milner St
Moore St
Hasley St
Rawlings St
Cadogan St
Cadogan Gdns
Ellis St
Sloane Tce
Onslow Sq
Onslow Gdns
Draycott Ave
Denyer St
Draycott Pl
Sloane Sq
Clivedon Pl
Sloane Sq
Lower Sloane St
Sloane Gdns
Wetherby Gardens
SOUTH KENSINGTON
Bina Gdns
Rosary Gdns
Sumner Pl
Pond Pl
Lucan Pl
Elystan St
Petyward
Sloane Ave
Ixworth Pl
Whitehead's Gve
CHELSEA
Elystan Pl
Cale St
Foulis Tce
Neville St
Fulham Rd
South Pde
Chelsea Sq
Dovehouse St
Sydney St
St Luke's St
Astell St
Jubilee Pl
Markham St
Markham Sq
Britten St
King's Rd
Cheltenham Tce
Walpole St
Royal Ave
St Leonard's Tce
Franklin's Row
Burton's Court
Turk's Row
Ranelagh Gardens
The Boltons
Drayton Gardens
Roland Gardens
Cranley Gdns
Evelyn Gdns
Old Church St
Manresa Rd
Carlyle Sq
Radnor Walk
Smith Tce
Smith St
Shawfield St
Chelsea Manor St
Flood Walk
Alpha Pl
Redburn St
Christchurch St
Royal Hospital Rd
Great Hall
West Rd
Tregunter Rd
Priory Wk
Gilston Rd
Cathcart Rd
Redcliffe Rd
Elm Park Gardens
Elm Park Rd
Callow St
The Vale
Mallord St
Oakley St
Glebe Pl
Bramerton St
Paultons Sq
Upper Cheyne Row
Cheyne Row
Phene St
Cheyne Gdns
Flood St
Swan Wk
Dilke St
The St
Hollywood Rd
Fawcett St
Park Walk
Limerston St
Chelsea Park Gdns
Netherton Gr
Beaufort St
Chelsea Embankment
See p128
Gertrude St
Lamont Rd
Langton St
Slaidburn St
Edith Gve
Fernshaw Rd
Ann La
Cheyne Walk
Battersea Bridge
Albert Bridge
The Pde
Children's Zoo
Hortensia Rd
Gunter Gve
Cremorne Rd
Ashburnham Rd
Tadema Rd
Uverdale Rd
Thames
Hester Rd
Elcho St
Anhalt Rd
Parkgate Rd
Juer St
Worfield St
Albert Bridge Rd
Carriage Dr West
Battersea Park
Boating Lake
Tetcott Rd
Lots Rd
Chelsea Creek
Battersea Church Rd
Westbridge Rd
Battersea Bridge Rd
Petworth St
BATTERSEA
Carriage Dr South
Prince of Wales Dr
Parkham St
Surrey La
Orbel St
Octavia St
Ursula St
Edna St
Harbour Ave
Cambridge Rd
Brynmaer Rd
Warriner Gardens
Battersea Park Rd
Latchmere Rd

INFORMATION

Internet Lounge	1	D2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

Chelsea Physic Garden	2	H3

SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Aston's Apartments	3	E2
Barmy Badger Backpackers	4	C1
base2stay	5	D1
easyHotel	6	D1
myhotel Chelsea	7	G2
Philbeach Hotel	8	C2

EATING (pp159–67)

Awana	9	G2
Bibendum	10	G1
Gordon Ramsay	11	H3
Made in Italy	12	F3
New Culture Revolution	13	F3
Tom Aikens	14	G2

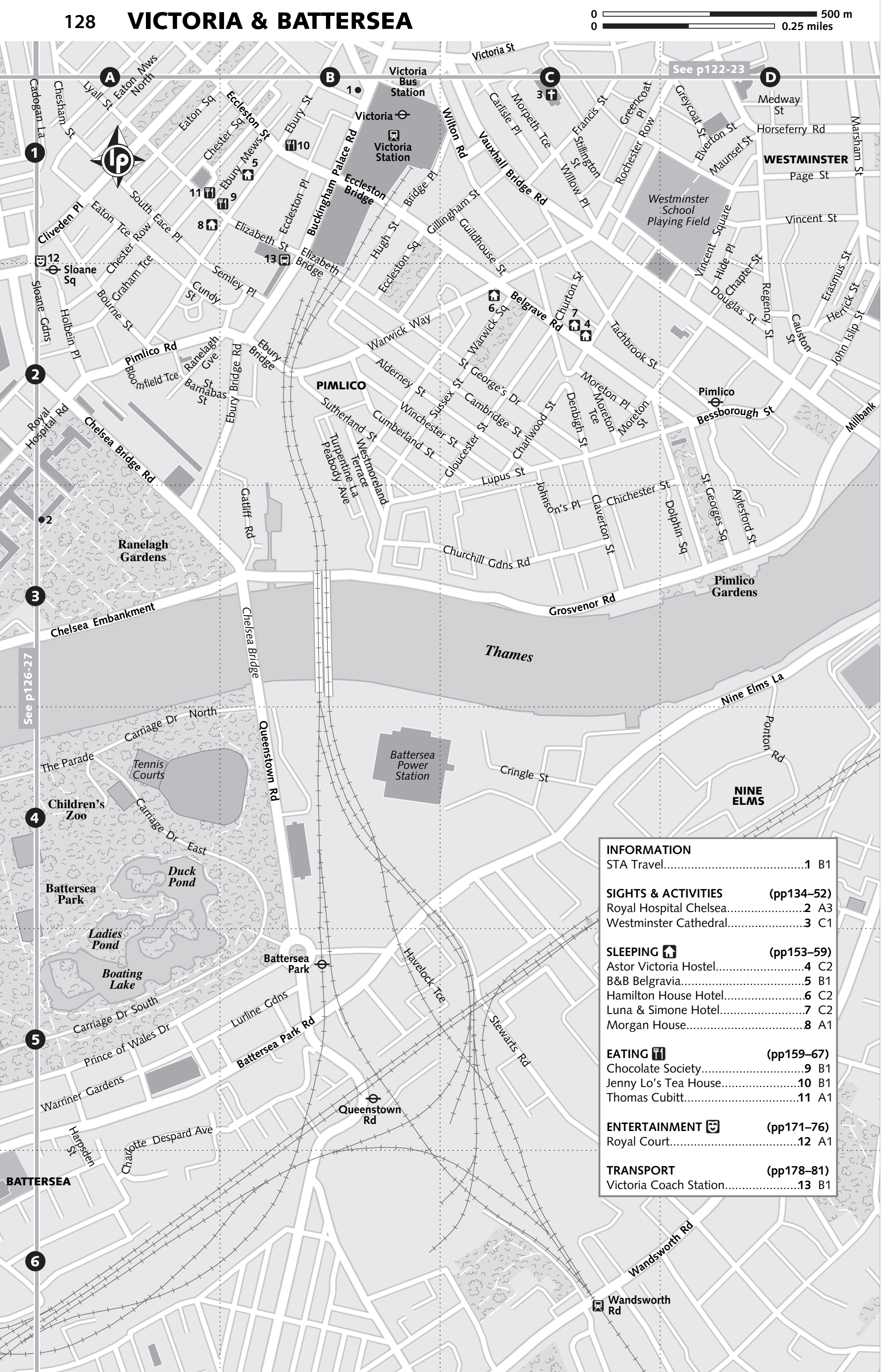
DRINKING (pp167–71)

King's Head & Eight Bells	15	G4

SHOPPING (pp176–78)

Antiquarius Antiques Centre	16	G2
Butler & Wilson	17	F2

VICTORIA & BATTERSEA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Victoria St
Victoria Bus Station
Victoria
Victoria Station
Cadogan La
Chesham St
Lyall St
Eaton Mws North
Eaton Sq
Chester Sq
Eccleston St
Ebury Mews
Ebury St
Buckingham Palace Rd
Eccleston Bridge
Wilton Rd
Vauxhall Bridge Rd
Carlisle Pl
Morpeth Tce
Francis St
Stillington St
Willow Pl
Greencoat Pl
Rochester Row
Greycoat St
Elverton St
Maunsel St
Medway St
Horseferry Rd
WESTMINSTER
Page St
Marsham St
Westminster School Playing Field
Vincent Square
Vincent St
Cliveden Pl
Eaton Tce
South Eaton Pl
Chester Row
Elizabeth St
Eccleston Pl
Elizabeth Bridge
Bridge Pl
Hugh St
Gillingham St
Guildhouse St
Sloane Sq
Graham Tce
Bourne St
Cundy St
Semley Pl
Eccleston Sq
Warwick Way
Belgrave Rd
Churton St
Tachbrook St
Hide Pl
Chapter St
Douglas St
Regency St
Causton St
Erasmus St
Herrick St
John Islip St
Sloane Gdns
Holbein Pl
Pimlico Rd
Ranelagh Gve
Bloomfield Tce
St Barnabas St
Ebury Bridge Rd
Ebury Bridge
PIMLICO
Alderney St
Warwick Sq
St George's Dr
Sussex St
Winchester St
Cambridge St
Charlwood St
Denbigh St
Moreton Pl
Moreton Tce
Moreton St
Pimlico
Bessborough St
Millbank
Royal Hospital Rd
Chelsea Bridge Rd
Sutherland St
Cumberland St
Westmoreland Terrace
Turpentine La
Peabody Ave
Gloucester St
Lupus St
Johnson's Pl
Claverton St
Chichester St
Dolphin Sq
St Georges Sq
Aylesford St
Gatliff Rd
Ranelagh Gardens
Churchill Gdns Rd
Pimlico Gardens
Grosvenor Rd
Chelsea Embankment
Chelsea Bridge
Thames
Nine Elms La
Ponton Rd
Carriage Dr North
The Parade
Tennis Courts
Queenstown Rd
Battersea Power Station
Cringle St
NINE ELMS
Children's Zoo
Carriage Dr East
Duck Pond
Battersea Park
Ladies Pond
Boating Lake
Havelock Tce
Battersea Park
Carriage Dr South
Lurline Gdns
Stewarts Rd
Prince of Wales Dr
Battersea Park Rd
Warriner Gardens
Queenstown Rd
Harpsden St
Charlotte Despard Ave
BATTERSEA
Wandsworth Rd
Wandsworth Rd

INFORMATION

STA Travel	1	B1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

Royal Hospital Chelsea	2	A3
Westminster Cathedral	3	C1

SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Astor Victoria Hostel	4	C2
B&B Belgravia	5	B1
Hamilton House Hotel	6	C2
Luna & Simone Hotel	7	C2
Morgan House	8	A1

EATING (pp159–67)

Chocolate Society	9	B1
Jenny Lo's Tea House	10	B1
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ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)

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WEST END (p130–31)

INFORMATION

American Express (Main Office)	1	D5
Borders	2	E2
Borders	3	B2
Britain & London Visitor Centre	4	D6
British Council	5	E6
easyInternetcafe	6	D2
easyInternetcafe	7	F5
easyInternetcafe	8	D1
Forbidden Planet	9	E3
Foyle's	10	E2
Grant & Cutler	11	B2
Helter Skelter	12	E2
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STA Travel	14	E3
Stanford's	15	F4
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Waterstone's	18	E2
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Alison Lapper statue	21	E5
Courtauld Gallery	22	H4
Eros Statue	23	C5
London Transport Museum	24	G4
London Trocadero	25	D4
National Gallery	26	E5
National Portrait Gallery	27	E5
Nelson's Column	28	E6
Photographer's Gallery	29	E4
Royal Academy of Arts	30	B5
Sir John Soane's Museum	31	H1
Somerset House	32	H4
St Martin-in-the-Fields	33	F5
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SLEEPING (pp153–59)

Brown's Hotel	35	A5
Charlotte Street Hotel	36	C1
Courthouse Hotel Kempinski	37	B3
Covent Garden Hotel	38	E2
Fielding Hotel	39	G3
Hazlitt's	40	D3
One Aldwych	41	H4
Oxford St YHA Hostel	42	C2
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Abeno Too	45	E4
Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill	46	B5
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dim T	48	C1
Eagle Bar Diner	49	D2
Floridita	50	C3
Food for Thought	51	F3
Gay Hussar	52	D2
Hakkasan	53	D1
Hummus Bros	54	C3
Imli	55	C2
Joe Allen	56	G4
Kettners	57	D3
Mildred's	58	C3
Neal's Yard Salad Bar	59	F3
Ping Pong	60	B3
Rasa Sumudra	61	C1
Rules	62	G4
Sarastro	63	G3
Sketch	64	A3
Spiga	65	C3
Wolseley	66	B6
Yauatcha	67	C3

DRINKING (pp167–71)

Absolut Ice Bar	68	B4
Coach & Horses	69	D3
Gordon's Wine Bar	70	G5
Jerusalem	71	C1
Lamb & Flag	72	F4
Museum Tavern	73	F1
Princess Louise	74	G1
Queen Mary	75	H5
W Sens	76	D6

ENTERTAINMENT (pp171–76)

100 Club	77	C2
Astoria	78	D2
Bar Rumba	79	D4
Borderline	80	D2
Coliseum	81	F5
Comedy Store	82	D5
Curzon	83	D3
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Heaven	86	F5
Leicester Square Half-Price Ticket Booth	87	E5
Lucky Voice	88	C3
Madame Jo Jo's	89	C3
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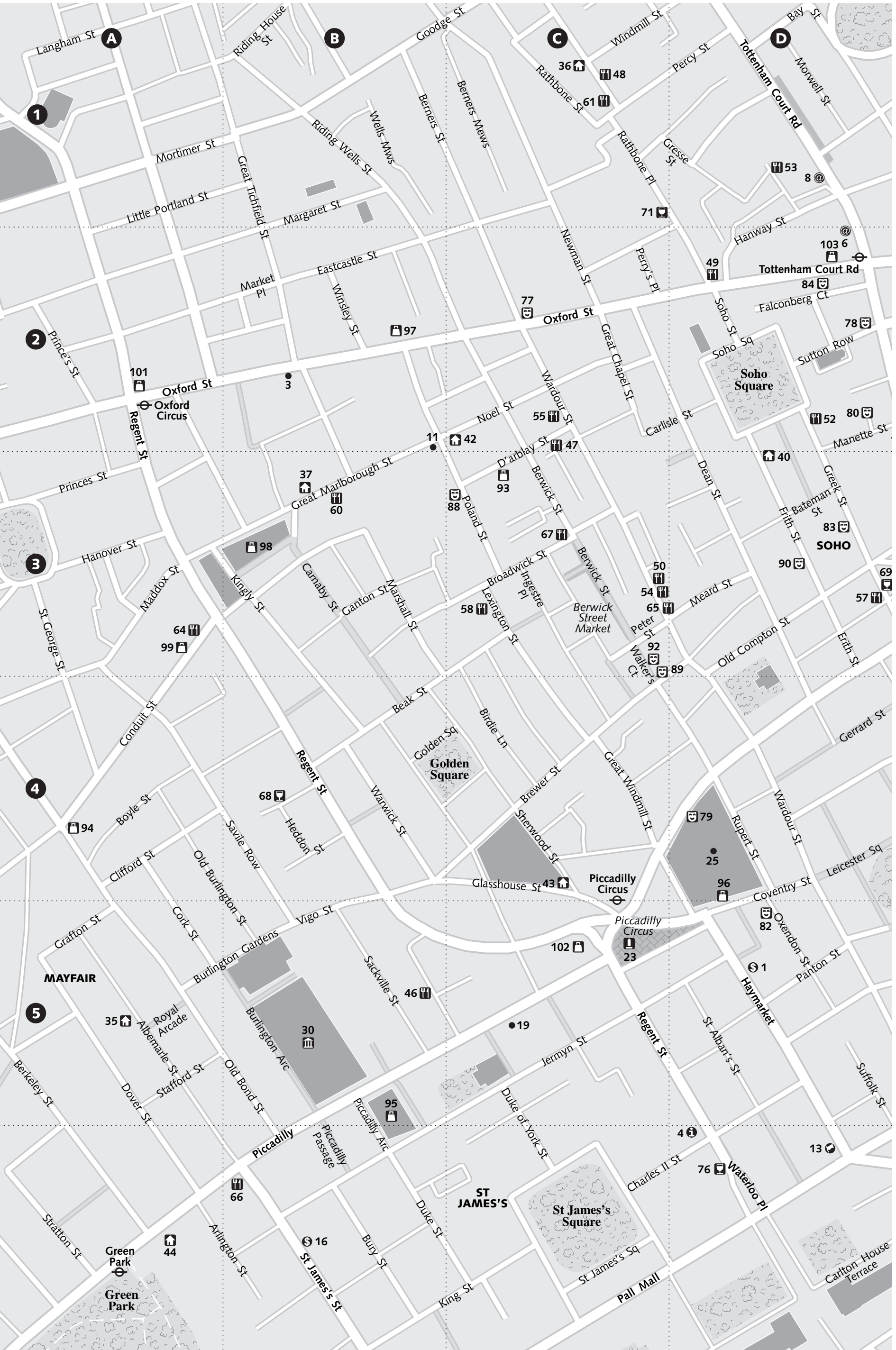
Too2Much	92	C3

SHOPPING (pp176–78)

BM Soho	93	C3
Burberry	94	A4
Fortnum & Mason	95	B5
HMV	96	D4
HMV	97	B2
Liberty	98	B3
Ray's Jazz Shop	(see 10)	
Rigby & Peller	99	A3
Rough Trade	100	F3
Top Shop Oxford Ticket Circus	101	A2
Virgin Megastore	102	C5
Virgin Megastore	103	D2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Newman St
Perry's Pl
Tottenham Court Rd
Falconberg Ct
Oxford St
Soho St
Soho Sq
Soho Square
Sutton Row
Prince's St
Oxford Circus
Regent St
Noel St
Great Chapel St
Wardour St
Carlisle St
Manette St
Princes St
Great Marlborough St
D'arblay St
Berwick St
Poland St
Dean St
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Bateman St
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Hanover St
Maddox St
Kingly St
Carnaby St
Ganton St
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Broadwick St
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Lexington St
Berwick Street Market
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Walker's Ct
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Old Compton St
Firth St
St George St
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Beak St
Birdie Ln
Golden Sq
Golden Square
Brewer St
Great Windmill St
Gerrard St
Boyle St
Savile Row
Heddon St
Warwick St
Sherwood St
Rupert St
Wardour St
Leicester Sq
Clifford St
Old Burlington St
Glasshouse St
Piccadilly Circus
Coventry St
Vigo St
Grafton St
Cork St
Burlington Gardens
Sackville St
Oxendon St
Panton St
Haymarket
MAYFAIR
Royal Arcade
Albemarle St
Stafford St
Burlington Arc
Old Bond St
Jermyn St
Duke of York St
St Alban's St
Suffolk St
Berkeley St
Dover St
Piccadilly
Piccadilly Passage
Piccadilly Arc
Charles II St
Waterloo Pl
Stratton St
Arlington St
St James's St
Bury St
Duke St
ST JAMES'S
St James's Square
St James's Sq
King St
Pall Mall
Carlton House Terrace
Green Park
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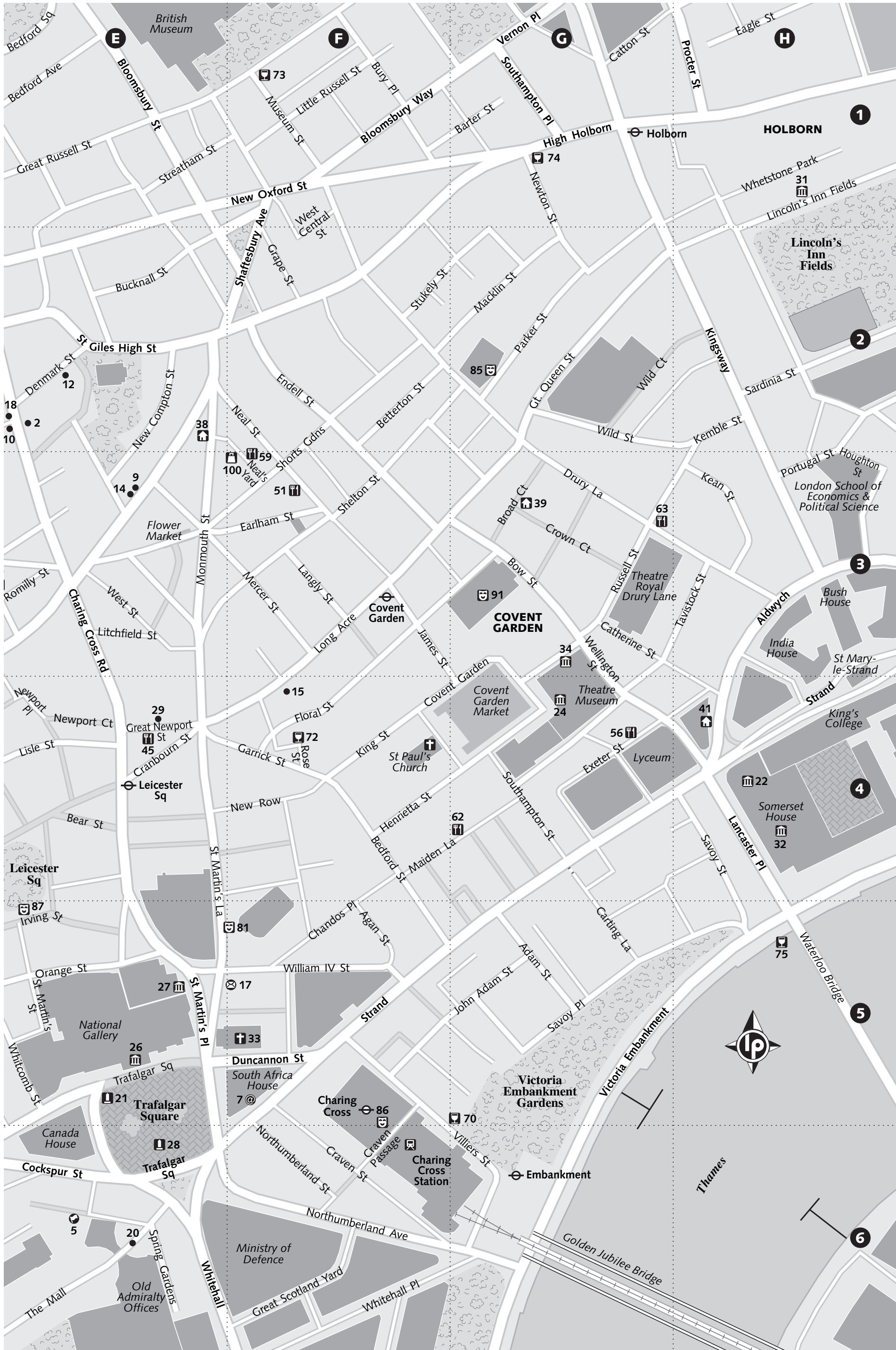
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Bedford Sq
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Catton St
Procter St
Eagle St
Barter St
High Holborn
Holborn
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Great Russell St
Streatham St
New Oxford St
West Central St
Newton St
Whetstone Park
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Lincoln's Inn Fields
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Grape St
Bucknall St
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Macklin St
St Giles High St
Denmark St
New Compton St
Endell St
Parker St
Betterton St
Gt Queen St
Wild Ct
Kingsway
Sardinia St
Neal St
Shorts Gdns
Neal's Yard
Wild St
Kemble St
Portugal St
Houghton St
London School of Economics & Political Science
Drury La
Kean St
Flower Market
Monmouth St
Earlham St
Shelton St
Broad Ct
Crown Ct
Romilly St
Charing Cross Rd
West St
Mercer St
Langly St
Long Acre
Covent Garden
Bow St
COVENT GARDEN
Russell St
Theatre Royal Drury Lane
Tavistock St
Aldwych
Bush House
India House
Litchfield St
James St
Catherine St
Wellington St
St Mary-le-Strand
Newport Pl
Newport Ct
Great Newport St
Floral St
Covent Garden Market
Theatre Museum
Strand
King's College
Lisle St
Cranbourn St
Garrick St
Rose St
King St
St Paul's Church
Exeter St
Lyceum
Leicester Sq
Bear St
New Row
Henrietta St
Southampton St
Somerset House
Lancaster Pl
Savoy St
Leicester Sq
Irving St
St Martin's La
Bedford St
Maiden La
Chandos Pl
Agar St
Carting La
Waterloo Bridge
Orange St
St Martin's St
William IV St
Strand
John Adam St
Adam St
Savoy Pl
Victoria Embankment
National Gallery
St Martin's Pl
Duncannon St
Whitcomb St
Trafalgar Sq
South Africa House
Charing Cross
Victoria Embankment Gardens
Trafalgar Square
Craven Passage
Charing Cross Station
Villiers St
Canada House
Trafalgar Sq
Northumberland St
Craven St
Embankment
Thames
Cockspur St
Northumberland Ave
Golden Jubilee Bridge
The Mall
Spring Gardens
Old Admiralty Offices
Whitehall
Ministry of Defence
Great Scotland Yard
Whitehall Pl
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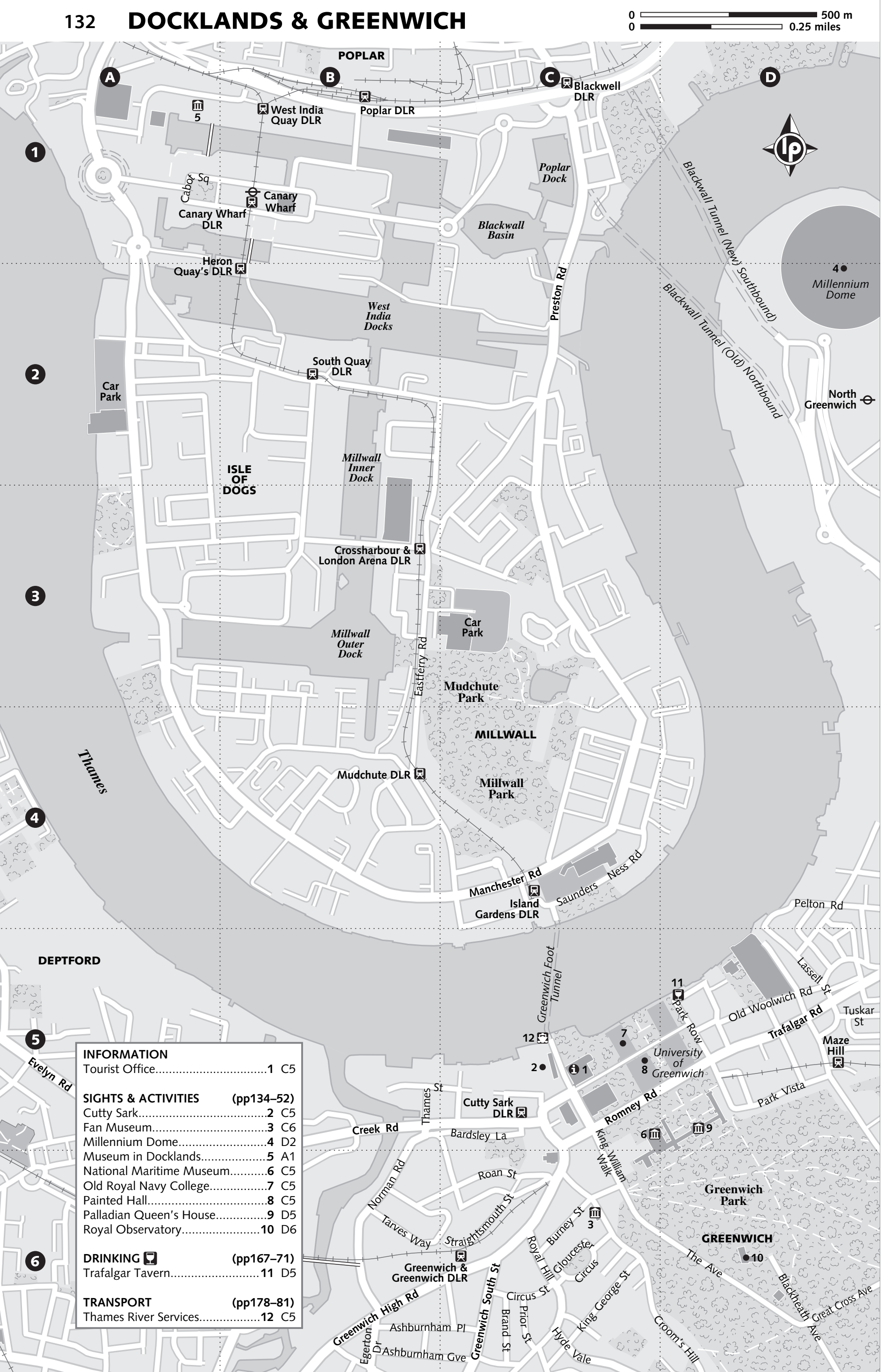
DOCKLANDS & GREENWICH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West India Quay DLR
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Cabot Sq
Canary Wharf
Canary Wharf DLR
Heron Quay's DLR
Poplar Dock
Blackwall Basin
West India Docks
South Quay DLR
Preston Rd
Blackwall Tunnel (New) Southbound
Blackwall Tunnel (Old) Northbound
Millennium Dome
North Greenwich
Car Park
ISLE OF DOGS
Millwall Inner Dock
Crossharbour & London Arena DLR
Millwall Outer Dock
Eastferry Rd
Mudchute Park
MILLWALL
Mudchute DLR
Millwall Park
Thames
Manchester Rd
Saunders Ness Rd
Island Gardens DLR
Pelton Rd
DEPTFORD
Greenwich Foot Tunnel
Park Row
Old Woolwich Rd
Lassell St
Trafalgar Rd
Tuskar St
Maze Hill
University of Greenwich
Park Vista
Evelyn Rd
Thames St
Cutty Sark DLR
Creek Rd
Bardsley La
Romney Rd
King William Walk
Roan St
Norman Rd
Tarves Way
Straightsmouth St
Greenwich & Greenwich DLR
Burney St
Royal Hill
Gloucester Circus
Greenwich Park
GREENWICH
The Ave
Blackheath Ave
Great Cross Ave
Greenwich High Rd
Greenwich South St
Circus St
Prior St
Brand St
King George St
Ashburnham Pl
Ashburnham Gve
Egerton Dr
Hyde Vale
Croom's Hill

INFORMATION

Tourist Office	1	C5

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp134–52)

Cutty Sark	2	C5
Fan Museum	3	C6
Millennium Dome	4	D2
Museum in Docklands	5	A1
National Maritime Museum	6	C5
Old Royal Navy College	7	C5
Painted Hall	8	C5
Palladian Queen's House	9	D5
Royal Observatory	10	D6

DRINKING 🍷 (pp167–71)

Trafalgar Tavern	11	D5

TRANSPORT (pp178–81)

Thames River Services	12	C5

(Continued from page 115)

Internet Resources

The Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com) links speedily to many of London's websites. You can also try the following:

BBC London (www.bbc.co.uk/London/whereyoulive)
Evening Standard (www.thisislondon.co.uk)
Time Out (www.timeout.com)
View London (www.viewlondon.co.uk)

Media

The only paper produced solely for Londoners, the *Evening Standard* tabloid, comes out in early and late editions throughout the day. *Metro* is a morning freebie from the same stable, while *Time Out* (£2.50) is the local listing guide *par excellence,* published every Tuesday.

Medical Services

To find a local doctor or hospital, consult the local telephone directory or call ☎ 100 (toll free). There is always one local chemist that opens 24 hours (see local newspapers or notices in chemist windows).

Hospitals with 24-hour accident and emergency units include:

Guy's Hospital (Map p125; ☎ 7188 7188; St Thomas St SE1; ⊖ London Bridge) There's also a dental A&E here.

Royal Free Hospital (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7794 0500; Pond St NW3; ⊖ Belsize Park)

University College Hospital (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0845 155 5000; Grafton Way WC1; ⊖ Euston Sq)

Money

Banks and ATMs are two-a-penny in central London. You can change cash easily at banks, bureaux de change and travel agents. If you use bureaux de change, check commission rates *and* exchange rates; some can be extortionate.

There are 24-hour bureaus in Heathrow Terminals 1, 3 and 4 (the one in Terminal 2 opens 6am to 11pm), in Gatwick's South and North Terminals, and at Stansted. The airport bureaus are good value, charging about 1.5% of the transaction value, with a £3 minimum. The following are reliable bureaus (both have many outlets):

American Express (Amex; Map pp130-1; ☎ 7484 9610; 30-31 Haymarket SW1; currency exchange ⏲ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus)

Thomas Cook (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7853 6400; 30 St James's St SW1; ⏲ 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Wed; ⊖ Green Park)

Post

London post offices usually open from 8.30am or 9am to 5pm or 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Some main ones also open 9am to noon or 1pm on Saturdays. The **Trafalgar Square post office** (Map pp130-1; GPO/Poste Restante), actually on William IV St, opens 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 5.30pm Saturday.

Telephone

Call centres offer booths where you can dial internationally for less than the standard British Telecom (BT) rate. These can be found on most high streets. If you've brought your mobile, it's a good idea to buy a local SIM card. The **Link** (☎ 0870 154 5540; www.thelink.co.uk) and **Carphone Warehouse** (☎ 0870 168 2002; www.carphone-warehouse.com) have branches all over the city. If you'd rather rent a mobile try:

Cellhire (☎ 0870 561 0610; www.cellhire.com; delivery £18)

Mobell (☎ 0800 243 524; www.mobell.com; delivery free)

Tourist Information

For a list of all tourist information centres in London and around Britain see www.visitmap.info/tic.

Britain & London Visitor Centre (Map pp130-1; www.visitbritain.com; 1 Regent St SW1; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Fri,10am-4pm Sat & Sun; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) Walk-in inquiries only. A comprehensive information centre that can book accommodation, theatre and transport tickets, and offers a bureau de change, international telephones and computer terminals for accessing tourist information on the web. It's open longer hours (9am to 5pm) on Saturday from June to September.

Corporation of London information centre (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7332 1456; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm daily Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat rest of year; ⊖ St Paul's) In St Paul's Churchyard EC4, opposite St Paul's Cathedral.

London Line (☎ 09068 663344; per min 60p) A telephone service that will give you the lowdown on events and attractions.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 0870 160 6070; www.statravel.co.uk) Victoria (Map p128; ☎ 0870 166 2642; 52 Grosvenor Gardens SW1; ⏲ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun; ⊖ Victoria); Euston Rd (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 166 2603; 117 Euston Rd NW1; ⊖ Euston) Long-standing and reliable with several branches in London.

Trailfinders (Map pp120-1; worldwide travel ☎ 0845 058 5858, 1st & business class ☎ 0845 054 6666; www.trailfinders.com; 194 & 215 Kensington High St W8; 🕘 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; ⊖ High St Kensington) A visa and passport service (☎ 0845 05 05 905), immunisation centre (☎ 7938 3999) and information centre (☎ 7938 3303). Branches in Covent Garden, Piccadilly, the City and Canary Wharf.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Considering its size and the disparities in wealth, London is remarkably safe. That said, keep your wits about you and don't flash your cash unnecessarily.

Take particular care at night. When travelling by tube, choose a carriage with other people in it and avoid deserted suburban stations. Following reports of sexual attacks, solo women travellers should avoid unlicensed minicabs.

Scams

Unfortunately tourists are always a target for scamsters. At the time of research, card-cloning through tampered ATMs was a concern. So guard your PIN details carefully and don't use an ATM that looks unusual.

Hotel and hostel touts descend on backpackers at popular tube and main-line stations. Only accept a lift if you know exactly where you're headed.

Some Soho strip clubs and hostess bars are dodgy, and people should be especially wary of those that tout for business on the street.

SIGHTS

London is big and attacking the sights is best done by area. Start in the tourist heart, the West End, with Soho, Covent Garden and Bloomsbury. Here are many of London's finest galleries and museums, its mainstream entertainment and funkiest shopping. West of here is old-money London, incorporating the frightfully well-heeled neighbourhoods of Mayfair, St James's and Kensington – home to royalty, the wealthy and some great museums. To the north, Marylebone and Notting Hill are groovier while southwards lie Westminster, Whitehall and the cradle of British democracy.

Across the river from the West End, the regenerated South Bank is home to some of London's most popular attractions, including the London Eye and the Tate Modern. Heading anticlockwise over the river again is Britain's financial cockpit, the City – St Paul's Cathedral is the main draw here. Continuing the loop you'll hit Hoxton and Shoreditch, new centres of London cool, and then Camden and Islington, the ones they replaced.

Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Sq is the public heart of London, hosting great rallies, marches and feverish New Year's festivities. Londoners congregate here to celebrate anything from football victories to the ousting of political leaders. Formerly ringed by gnarling traffic, the square's been tidied up and is now one of the world's grandest public places. Don't miss Marc Quin's beautiful marble statue of a pregnant **Alison Lapper** (2005) in the northeast corner.

The square is flanked by splendid buildings: the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery and the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. The ceremonial **Pall Mall** runs southwest from the top of the square. Further south stands **Admiralty Arch** (Map pp130–1; built in honour of Queen Victoria in 1910), beyond which the Mall leads to Buckingham Palace. Nelson surveys his fleet from the 43.5m-high **Nelson's Column** (Map pp130–1), erected in 1843 to commemorate Nelson's 1805 victory over Napoleon off Cape Trafalgar in Spain.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Following a two-year building project the fantastic **National Gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7747 2885; www.nationalgallery.org.uk; Trafalgar Sq WC2; admission free, temporary exhibition prices vary; 🕘 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 9pm Wed; ⊖ Charing Cross) is looking better than ever, with bright and airy internal spaces, a cleaned-up entrance complete with beautiful dome, a highlights gallery and the popular **National Dining Rooms** restaurant. And there are still the 2300-plus Western European paintings spanning 1250 to 1900 to draw the four million annual visitors.

Highlights include Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (voted the nation's favourite painting in 2005), Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* but audio tours cover the lot. Free one-hour guided tours leave at 11.30am and 2.30pm weekdays and at 11.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm and 3.30pm Saturday (additional tours at 6pm and 6.30pm on Wednesday). If you prefer, you can devise and print off your own tour with the flashy computer screens of **Art Start**.

Visit on Wednesday evenings for live music, the licensed bar and free talks.

WHO'S WHO AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Highlights of today's faces include a very pink portrait of Darcy Bussell, a full-length picture of Judi Dench, an amazing 3-D depiction of JK Rowling, Richard Branson's mug made up of postcards of Dame Laura Knight (self-portraits) collaged together, and 67 minutes of David Beckham sleeping (which is probably as close as any of us will get to him in that position). Dame AS Byatt's portrait/splash of primary colours is reminiscent of a toddler's effort, but apparently she likes it.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

This **gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7306 0055; www.npg.org.uk; St Martin's Cres WC2; admission free; 🕘 10am-6pm Sat-Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri; ⊖ Charing Cross) is so much better than the rather dry name suggests. Founded in 1856, the permanent collection (around 10,000 works) displays famous people from the 15th century right through to the present day, starting with the early Tudors on the top floor and descending to contemporary figures on the ground floor.

An audio guide for £2 will lead you through the gallery's most famous pictures. Look out for the temporary exhibitions – from June to September the gallery hosts the prestigious National Portrait Award.

Whitehall

Whitehall is the administrative heart of the country and is best explored on foot (see the Whitehall Walking Tour, p152).

BANQUETING HOUSE

The beautiful, classical design of the **Banqueting House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 4179; www.hrp.org.uk; Whitehall SW1; adult/child £4.50/3; 🕘 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ⊖ Charing Cross) was daringly conceived by Inigo Jones for James I in 1622. It's the only surviving part of the palace after the Tudor bit burnt down in 1698. The key attraction of the house is the Main Hall's ceiling, which was painted by Rubens in 1635 at the behest of Charles I. Sadly he didn't get to enjoy it for long as in 1649 he was frogmarched out of the 1st-floor balcony to lose his head for treason. A bust outside commemorates the king. Audio guides are available for £4.50 per adult.

CHURCHILL MUSEUM & CABINET WAR ROOMS

The **Cabinet War Rooms** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 6961; www.iwm.org.uk; King Charles St SW1; adult/child under 16yr £11/free; 🕘 9.30am-6pm, last entry 5pm; ⊖ Westminster) were Churchill's underground military HQ during WWII. Now a wonderfully evocative and atmospheric museum, the restored and preserved rooms (including Churchill's bedroom) capture the drama of the time. The new **Churchill Museum** is the first national museum dedicated to the prime minister and an intriguing exposé of the public and private faces of the man.

Westminster & Pimlico

Westminster has been the centre of political power for over a millennium and most of its interesting places are linked with the monarchy, parliament or the Church of England. The area is a remarkable spectacle, a picture of rare architectural cohesion and an awesome display of power, gravitas and historical import. Pimlico, by contrast, is pretty mind-numbing except for the Tate Britain.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

One of the most sacred and symbolic sites in England is **Westminster Abbey** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7654 4900; www.westminster-abbey.org; Dean's Yard SW1; adult/child £10/6; 🕘 9.30am-3.45pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-6pm Wed, 9am-1.45pm Sat; ⊖ Westminster). With the exception of Edward V and Edward VIII, every sovereign has been crowned here since William the Conqueror, and most of the monarchs from Henry III (died 1272) to George II (1760) are also buried here.

The abbey is a magnificent and arresting sight. Though a mixture of architectural styles, it is considered the finest example of Early English Gothic (1180–1280) in existence. The original church was built in the 11th century, during the Dark Ages, by the King (later Saint) Edward the Confessor, who is buried in the chapel behind the main altar. Henry III (r 1216–72) began work on the new building but didn't complete it; the French Gothic nave was finished in 1388. Henry VII's huge and magnificent chapel was consecrated in 1519 after 16 years of construction. Unlike St Paul's, Westminster Abbey has never been a cathedral. It is what is called a 'royal peculiar' and is administered directly by the Crown.

The interior is less impressive than the exterior but there are many highlights, including the incongruously ordinary-looking **Coronation Chair**, the late perpendicular-style **Henry VII Chapel**, the **Royal Air Force (RAF) Chapel**, the octagonal **Chapter House** (admission with abbey ticket or separately for a donation; closes 1 hour before the abbey), the **Pyx Chamber** (admission as Chapter House) and the **Abbey Museum** with death masks of generations of royalty.

Free concerts are held from 12.30pm to 2pm once a week from the end of July through August in the 900-year-old **College Garden** (🕑 10am-6pm Tue-Thu Apr-Sep, to 4pm Tue-Thu Oct-Mar).

Sign up for a guided tour (£4) at the information desk or take an audio tour (£3). Evensong is at 6.30pm weekdays, 3pm weekends; Sunday Eucharist is at 11.15am.

Next door to the abbey is the smaller **St Margaret's Church** (admission free), the House of Commons' place of worship since 1614. There are windows commemorating churchgoers Caxton and Milton, and Sir Walter Raleigh is buried by the altar.

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Comprising the House of Commons (where Members of Parliament discuss legislation) and the House of Lords (home of the peers), the **Houses of Parliament** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7219 4272; www.parliament.uk; Parliament Sq SW1; ⊖ Westminster) are in the Palace of Westminster, built by Sir Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin in 1840 when neo-Gothic style was in vogue.

The most famous feature is the clock tower **Big Ben** (Map pp122–3). Ben is actually the 13-ton bell, named after Benjamin Hall, who was commissioner of works when the tower was completed in 1858. The best view of the whole complex is from the eastern side of Lambeth Bridge.

When Parliament is in session, visitors are admitted to the **House of Commons Visitors' Gallery**. Expect to queue for at least an hour if you haven't already organised a ticket through your local British embassy. Note that parliamentary recesses (ie holidays) last for three months over the summer, and a couple of weeks over Easter and Christmas. The **House of Lords Visitors' Gallery** (☎ 7219 3107; admission free; 🕑 from 2.30pm Mon & Tue, from 3pm Wed & Thu, from 11am some Fridays) is also open to outsiders.

The roof of **Westminster Hall**, added between 1394 and 1401, is the earliest known example of a hammer-beam roof and has been described as 'the greatest surviving achievement of medieval English carpentry'.

When parliament is in recess, there are guided **summer tours** (☎ 0870 906 3773; www.parliament.uk; from St Stephen's Entrance, St Margaret St; 75min tours adult/child £7/5; telephone for times) of both chambers and other historic buildings.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

Completed in 1903, **Westminster Cathedral** (Map p128; ☎ 7798 9064; Victoria St SW1; admission free; 🕑 7am-7pm; ⊖ Victoria) is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and the only good example of neo-Byzantine architecture in London. Its distinctive candy-striped redbrick and white-stone tower features prominently on the west London skyline.

The interior is part splendid marble and mosaic and part bare brick due to lack of funds. It features the highly regarded stone carvings of the 14 **Stations of the Cross** (1918) by Eric Gill. For £3 you can take a lift up to the 83m tower of the **Campanile Bell** for splendid views of London, or call to book a tour (£2.50).

TATE BRITAIN

The place to see, appreciate and interpret British art from the 16th century to the present, **Tate Britain** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Millbank SW1; admission free; 🕑 10am-5.50pm; ⊖ Pimlico) features works by notables such as William Blake, the Hogarths, Gainsborough, Whistler and Spencer, as well as the controversial annual Turner Prize. The quirky **Clore Gallery** holds the bulk of JMW Turner's paintings.

There are free one-hour guided tours running from 11am to 3pm. The immensely popular **Tate Restaurant** (☎ 7887 8825; mains £14.95), with an impressive Rex Whistler mural, is open for lunch and afternoon tea.

St James's & Mayfair

Monopoly wasn't lying – high-society Mayfair *is* the most expensive place in London. St James's is a mixture of exclusive gentlemen's clubs, historic shops and elegant buildings; indeed, there are some 150 historically noteworthy buildings within its 36 hectares.

INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

A one-stop contemporary art bonanza, the exciting programme at the **Institute for Contemporary Arts** (ICA; Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 3647; www.ica.org.uk; The Mall SW1; admission varies; 🕑 noon-11pm Mon, to 1am Tue-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun; ⊖ Charing Cross) includes film, photography, theatre, installations, talks, performance art, DJs, digital art and book readings. Stroll around the galleries, watch a film, browse the bookshop then head to the bar for a late beer (open till 1am).

ST JAMES'S PARK & ST JAMES'S PALACE

The neatest of London's royal parks, **St James's Park** (Map pp122-3; The Mall SW1; ⊖ St James's Park) has the best view, spanning Westminster, Buckingham Palace and St James's Palace. The flowerbeds are spectacular, but it's the lake and waterfowl that really pop.

The striking Tudor gatehouse of St James's Palace, initiated by the palace-mad Henry VIII in 1530, is best approached from St James's St to the north of the park. This was the residence of Prince Charles and his sons until they shifted next door to the former residence of the Queen Mother, **Clarence House** (1828), after she died in 2002 (and the future king spent £4.6 million reshaping the house to his own design).

SPENCER HOUSE

The ancestral home of Princess Diana's family, **Spencer House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7499 8620; www.spencerhouse.co.uk; 27 St James's Pl SW1; adult/child £9/7; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Sun Feb-Jul & Sep-Dec; ⊖ Green Park) was built in the Palladian style between 1756 and 1766. Although the Spencers moved out in 1927 and the house became offices, an £18 million restoration project returned it to its former glory in the 1980s. Visits through eight state rooms of the house are by guided tour only (last tour 4.45pm). The restored gardens (£3.50) are opened just a few days each summer.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The official residence of Queen Elizabeth II, **Buckingham Palace** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7830 4832; www.royalcollection.org.uk; adult/child £14/8; 🕑 9.45am-3.45pm 26 July-24 Sep; ⊖ St James's Park) is at the southwestern end of the Mall. Built in 1803 for the Duke of Buckingham, it replaced St James's Palace as the royal family's London home in 1837. Nineteen lavishly furnished staterooms, used by the royals to meet and greet, are open to visitors when HRH takes her holidays in Scotland. The tour includes **Queen Victoria's Picture Gallery** (76.5m long, with works by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Canaletto, Poussin and Vermeer) and the **Throne Room**, with his-and-her pink chairs initialled 'ER' and 'P'.

Changing of the Guard

London's quintessential tourist attraction takes place when the old guard (Foot Guards of the Household Regiment) comes off duty to be replaced by the new guard in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace. If you arrive early, you can gape at the soldiers' bright-red uniforms and bearskin hats as they shout and march in one of the world's most famous displays of pageantry. Otherwise, the backs of heads will be your view. The **ceremony** takes place at 11.30am daily from April until the end of July and on alternate days for the rest of the year, weather permitting.

Queen's Gallery

This **gallery** (Map pp122-3; adult/child £7.50/4; 🕑 10am-5.30pm) houses displays from the extensive Royal Collection of art and treasures. Originally designed by John Nash as a conservatory, it was smashed by the Luftwaffe in 1940 before being reopened as a gallery in 1962. Following a £20 million renovation and expansion, it reopened for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002.

Royal Mews

Sheltering immaculately groomed royal horses, the **Royal Mews** (Map pp122-3; Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; adult/child £6.50/4; 🕑 10am-5pm 25 Jul-24 Sep, 11am-4pm 25 Mar-24 Jul & 25 Sep-29 Oct; ⊖ Victoria) also houses opulent royal vehicles, including the stunning gold coach of 1762, which has been used for every coronation since George III, and the 1910 Glass Coach, used for royal weddings.

HANDEL HOUSE MUSEUM

George Frideric Handel's pad from 1723 to his death in 1759 is now a **museum** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7399 1953; www.handelhouse.org; 25 Brook St W1; adult/child £5/2; 🕑 10am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-8pm Thu, noon-6pm Sun; ⊖ Bond St) dedicated to his life and 18th-century culture. Handel wrote some of his greatest works, including *Messiah,* here and music still fills the house at live recitals (see the website for details).

Many years and genres later, Jimi Hendrix lived at number 23 so there's also a small collection of photographs taken in his flat.

GREEN PARK

Green Park is less manicured than the adjoining St James's Park. It was once a duelling ground and served as a vegetable garden during WWII.

West End – Soho to the Strand

The West End is more a cultural term than a geographical one, but it basically takes in Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Sq to the south, Oxford St and Tottenham Court Rd to the north, Regent St to the west and Covent Garden and the Strand to the east. A heady mixture of consumerism and culture, outstanding museums, galleries, historic buildings and entertainment venues jostles with tacky tourist traps.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

Named after the stiff collars ('picadils') that were the sartorial staple of a 17th-century tailor who lived nearby, Piccadilly Circus is home to the popular landmark the **Eros statue** (Map pp130–1). It's a thronging hub charged with neon and choking fumes and the reliable Virgin Megastore.

London Trocadero

The green flags of the **Trocadero** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0906 888 1100; www.troc.co.uk; 1 Piccadilly Circus W1; ⏰ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) will try and lure you into this supposed pleasure park of cinema, virtual reality rides etc. But once you're inside this torturous temple to tack you'll be screaming to be released.

PICCADILLY

Piccadilly is home to the quintessential London icons the Ritz hotel and Fortnum & Mason department store.

Royal Academy of Arts

Britain's first art school, the wonderful **Royal Academy of Arts** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7300 8000; www.royalacademy.org.uk; Burlington House, Piccadilly W1; admission varies; ⏰ 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri; ⊖ Green Park) has created a storm in recent years, with perfectly pitched shows ranging from China: the Three Emperors to its popular Summer Exhibitions showcasing the work of contemporary British artists.

Burlington Arcade

The well-to-do **Burlington Arcade** (Map pp130-1; 51 Piccadilly W1; ⊖ Green Park), built in 1819, is most famous for the Burlington Berties, uniformed guards who patrol the area keeping an eye out for punishable offences such as running, chewing gum or whatever else might lower the shopping arcade's tone.

REGENT STREET

Distinguished by elegant shop fronts, Regent St is home to Hamley's, London's premier toy and game store, and the upmarket department store Liberty (p176).

OXFORD STREET

Oxford St is the zenith of high-street shopping, a must or a miss depending on your retail persuasion. West towards Marble Arch you'll find many famous department stores including the stupendous Selfridges (p176).

SOHO

A decade ago this lively area was known mostly for strip clubs and peepshows. The sleaze is still there but these days it blends with some of London's trendiest clubs, bars and restaurants. West of Soho proper is **Carnaby Street**, the epicentre of London's 'swinging '60s', whose tourist tack is getting trendy neighbours.

LEICESTER SQUARE

Pedestrianised Leicester (*les*-ter) Sq is usually heaving with tourists – and inevitably buskers. Dominated by large cinemas, it often hosts star-studded premieres.

CHINATOWN

Lisle and Gerrard Sts form the heart of Chinatown (Map pp130–1), which is full of verve and unfairly hip Japanese youngsters. Street signs are bilingual and the streets themselves are lined with Asian restaurants. If you're in town in late January or early February, don't miss the sparkles and crackles of Chinese New Year.

COVENT GARDEN

This elegant **piazza** (Map pp130-1; ⊖ Covent Garden), London's first planned square, is a tourist mecca where chain restaurants, souvenir shops, balconied bars and street entertainers vie for the punters' pound. It positively heaves in summer, especially weekends.

In the 1630s Inigo Jones converted the former vegetable field into a graceful square that at first housed the fruit and vegetable market immortalised in the film *My Fair Lady*. The area slumped and became home to brothels and coffee houses, but the market was shifted in the 1980s and Covent Garden was transformed into one of the city's grooviest hubs.

Photographers' Gallery

For photography fans, this small **gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7831 1772; www.photonet.org.uk; 5 & 8 Great Newport St WC2; admission free; ⏰ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat except Thu 11am-8pm, noon-6pm Sun; ⊖ Leicester Sq) showcasing UK and international talent is worth a peep. At number 8 is the exhibition space and bookshop; at number 5 is a café and print sales gallery.

London Transport Museum

At the time of writing, this excellent **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7379 6344; www.ltmuseum.co.uk; Covent Garden Piazza WC2; ⊖ Covent Garden) was closed for an £18.6-million refurbishment. When it reopens (spring 2007) it promises even better displays on the city's transport in the past, present and future (spaceships in the capital? Flying cars?).

Theatre Museum

This **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7943 4700; Russell St WC2; admission free; ⏰ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; ⊖ Covent Garden) is a branch of the Victoria & Albert Museum (p146) and displays costumes, artefacts and curiosities relating to the history of British theatre.

THE STRAND

Described by Benjamin Disraeli in the 19th century as Europe's finest street, this 'beach' of the Thames – which was built to connect Westminster (the seat of political power) and the City (the commercial centre) – still boasts a few classy hotels but has lost much of its lustre.

Somerset House

The first Tudor **Somerset House** (Map pp130-1; www.somerset-house.org.uk; Strand WC2; ⊖ Temple) was built for the Duke of Somerset in 1551. For two centuries it played host to wild masked balls, peace treaties, the Parliamentary army during the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell's wake, royals and foreign diplomats. Having fallen into disrepair it was pulled down in 1775 and rebuilt to designs by William Chambers. It went on to house among other weighty organisations the Royal Academy of the Arts, the Society of Antiquaries, the Navy Board and that most popular of institutions the Inland Revenue.

It's now home to three fascinating galleries surrounding a fantastic courtyard of dancing fountains with summer open-air events and a winter ice-rink. Out the back there's a wonderful terrace, restaurant and café overlooking the Thames.

The **Courtauld Gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7848 2526; adult/child £5/free, admission free 10am-2pm Mon; ⏰ 10am-6pm) displays a wealth of 14th- to 20th-century works, including a roomful of Rubens and impressionist and postimpressionist works by Van Gogh, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec.

The **Gilbert Collection** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7420 9400; adult/child £5/free; ⏰ 10am-6pm) includes such treasures as European silverware, gold snuffboxes and Italian mosaics bequeathed to the nation by London-born American businessman Arthur Gilbert.

The **Hermitage Rooms** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7845 4630; adult/child £6/free; ⏰ 10am-6pm) display diverse and rotating exhibitions from St Petersburg's renowned (and underfunded) State Hermitage Museum, to which goes a slice of your admission fee.

LONDON FOR FREE

Tell your bank manager to back off. Many of London's sights are absolutely free (hurrah) including the following: the British Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Photographers' Gallery, Guildhall, Museum of London, Tate Modern, Bank of England Museum, Imperial War Museum, Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum, National History Museum, Science Museum and the Wallace Collection.

Bloomsbury

Bloomsbury is a genteel blend of the University of London, beautiful Georgian squares, the British Museum and literary history. **Russell Square**, its very heart, was laid out in 1800 and is London's largest square.

Between the world wars these pleasant streets were colonised by a group of artists and intellectuals known collectively as the Bloomsbury Group, which included the novelists Virginia Woolf and EM Forster, and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

BRITISH MUSEUM

London's most visited attraction, the **British Museum** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 1555; www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk; Great Russell St WC1; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Sat & Sun, to 8.30pm Thu & Fri; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd or Russell Sq) is the largest in the country and one of the oldest and finest in the world, boasting vast Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, Oriental and Roman galleries among many others.

Before you get to the galleries you'll be blown away by the **Great Court**, which was restored and augmented by Norman Foster in 2000. The courtyard now boasts a spectacular glass-and-steel roof and somehow manages to be more luminous than outside – it's one of the most impressive architectural spaces in the capital. In the centre is the **Reading Room**, with

BRITAIN & GREECE SQUABBLE OVER MARBLES

Wonderful though it is, the British Museum can sometimes feel like one vast repository for stolen booty. Much of what's on display wasn't just 'picked up' along the way by Victorian travellers and explorers, but stolen, or purchased under dubious circumstances.

Restive foreign governments occasionally pop their heads over the parapet to demand the return of their property. The British Museum says 'no' and the problem goes away until the next time. Not the Greeks, however. They have been kicking up a stink demanding the return of the so-called Elgin Marbles, the ancient marble sculptures that once adorned the Parthenon. The British Museum, and successive British governments, steadfastly refuse to hand over the priceless works that were removed from the Parthenon and shipped to England by the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, the Lord Elgin, between 1801 and 1805. (When Elgin blew all his dough, he sold the marbles to the government.) The diplomatic spat continues. Only time will tell who blinks first.

stunning blue and gold domed ceiling where Karl Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. Off to the right is the **Enlightenment Gallery**, the oldest and grandest gallery in the museum, the first section of the redesigned museum to be built in 1823.

The enthralling exhibits began in 1753 with a 'cabinet of curiosities' bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane to the nation on his death; this has mushroomed over the years partly through the plundering of the empire (see boxed text, above).

Among the many must-sees are the **Rosetta Stone**, discovered in 1799 and the key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics; the controversial **Parthenon Sculptures**, which once adorned the walls of the Parthenon in Athens; the stunning **Oxus Treasure** of 7th- to 4th-century BC Persian gold; and the Anglo-Saxon **Sutton Hoo Ship Burial** site. Along with the Great Court, the most recent additions to the museum are the **Sainsbury African Galleries**, the restored **King's Library** and the new **Wellcome Gallery of Ethnography**.

You'll need multiple visits to savour even the highlights here; happily there are nine 50-minute free 'eye opener' tours, from 11am to 3.30pm daily except Friday (till 3pm), focusing on different world cultures. Other tours include the 90-minute highlights tour, at 10.30am, 1pm and 3pm daily (adult/child £8/5), and a range of audio guides (£3.50). Given the museum's mind-boggling size and scope, an initial tour is highly recommended.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

Holborn's most distinctive features are the wonderful Sir John Soane's Museum and the atmospheric Inns of Court, built here to symbolise the law's role as mediator in the traditional power struggle between Westminster and the City. The little pocket of Clerkenwell was for most of the 19th and 20th centuries a dilapidated, working-class area of no interest to anyone but its inhabitants. In the 1980s property developers moved in and Clerkenwell has been transformed into an appealing and trendy corner of the capital, replete with new pubs, restaurants and clubs.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

One of the most charming London sights, this tragically undervisited **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7405 2107; www.soane.org; 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; admission free, tour 2.30pm Sat £3; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 6-9pm 1st Tue of month; ⊖ Holborn) represents the taste of celebrated architect and collector extraordinaire Sir John Soane (1753–1837).

The house is largely as it was when Sir John was taken out in a box. Among his eclectic acquisitions are an Egyptian sarcophagus, ancient vases and works of art, and the original *Rake's Progress*, William Hogarth's set of cartoon caricatures of late-18th-century London lowlife.

INNS OF COURT

Clustered around Holborn to the south of Fleet St are the Inns of Court (Map pp122–3), the alleys, atmosphere and open spaces of which provide an urban oasis. All London barristers work from within one of the four Inns, and a roll call of former members would include the likes of Oliver Cromwell and Charles Dickens to Mahatma Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher. It would take a lifetime working here to grasp the intricacies of the arcane protocols of the Inns – they're similar to the Freemasons, and both are 13th-century creations. It's best just to soak up the dreamy atmosphere, relax, and thank your lucky stars you're not one of the bewigged and deadly serious barristers scurrying about.

Lincoln's Inn (☎ 7405 1393; Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; 🕑 grounds 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, chapel 12-2.30pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ Holborn), largely intact with several original 15th-century buildings, is the most attractive of the bunch with a chapel and pretty landscaped gardens. **Gray's Inn** (☎ 7458 7800; Gray's Inn Rd WC1; 🕑 grounds 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, chapel 10am-6pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ Chancery Lane) was largely rebuilt after the Luftwaffe levelled it. **Middle Temple** (☎ 7427 4800; Middle Temple Lane EC4; 🕑 10-11.30am & 3-4pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ Temple) and **Inner Temple** (☎ 7797 8250; King's Bench Walk EC4; 🕑 10am-4pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ Temple) both sit between Fleet St and Victoria Embankment – the former is the best preserved while the latter is home to the *Da Vinci Code*'s Temple Church.

The City

The City of London, the commercial heart of the capital, is the 'square mile' on the northern bank of the Thames where the Romans first built their walled community two millennia ago. Its boundaries have changed little since, and you can always tell when you're within them because the Corporation of London's coat of arms appears on the street signs. As well as atmospheric winding alleyways, St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London attract visitors.

Less than 10,000 people actually live here, although some 300,000 descend on it each weekday, where they generate almost three-quarters of Britain's entire GDP before heading home.

FLEET STREET

As 20th-century London's 'Street of Shame', **Fleet Street** (Map pp122-3; ⊖ Blackfriars) was synonymous with the UK's scurrilous tabloids until the mid-1980s when the press barons embraced computer technology, ditched a load of staff and largely relocated to the Docklands.

DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE

Where Samuel Johnson and his assistants compiled the first English dictionary between 1748 and 1759, **Dr Johnson's House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7353 3745; www.drjohnsonshouse.org; 17 Gough Sq EC4; admission £4.50; 🕑 11am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, to 5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; ⊖ Chancery Lane) is a well-preserved Georgian building. It's full of prints and portraits of friends and intimates, including Johnson's Jamaican servant, to whom he bequeathed the house in his will.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Dominating the City with a dome second in size only to St Peter's in Rome, **St Paul's Cathedral** (Map p125; ☎ 7236 4128; www.stpauls.co.uk; adult/child £9.50/3.50; 🕑 8.30am-4pm; ⊖ St Paul's) was built between 1675 and 1710 by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of 1666. Four other cathedrals on this site, the first dating from 604, preceded it.

The dome is renowned for somehow dodging the bombs during the Blitz of WWII and became an icon of the resilience shown in the capital during the crisis. Outside the cathedral, to the north, is a **monument to the people of London**, a simple and elegant memorial to the 32,000 Londoners who weren't so lucky.

Inside, some 30m above the main paved area, is the first of three domes (actually a dome inside a cone, inside a dome) supported by eight huge columns. The walkway round its base is called the **Whispering Gallery**, because if you talk close to the wall your words will carry to the opposite side 32m away.

This, the **Stone Gallery** and the **Golden Gallery** can be reached by a staircase on the western side of the southern transept. It is 530 lung-busting steps to the Golden Gallery at the very top, and an unforgettable view of London. If that's too much, you still get terrific vistas from the lower galleries.

The **Crypt** has memorials to up to 300 military demigods, including Wellington, Kitchener and Nelson, whose body lies below the dome. But the most poignant memorial is to Sir Christopher Wren himself. On a simple slab bearing his name a Latin inscription translates as: 'If you seek his memorial, look about you'.

Audio tours lasting 45 minutes are available for £3.50. Guided tours (adult/child £3/1) leave the tour desk at 11am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 2pm (90 minutes). There are organ concerts at St Paul's at 5pm most Sundays. Evensong takes place at 5pm most weekdays and at 3.15pm on Sunday.

GUILDHALL

Plum in the middle of the 'square mile', the **Guildhall** (Map p125; ☎ 7606 3030; Basinghall St EC2; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sun May-Sep; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; ⊖ Bank) has been the seat of the City's local government for eight centuries. The present building dates from the early 15th century.

Visitors can see the **Great Hall** where the mayor is 'sworn in' and where important chaps like the Tsar of Russia and the Prince Regent celebrated beating Napoleon. It's a vast, impressive space with the shields and banners of London's 12 principal livery companies; carved galleries, the west of which is protected by slightly disturbing statues of giants Gog and Magog; and a beautiful oak-panelled roof. Beneath it is London's largest **medieval crypt** (☎ 7606 3030, ext 1463; visited by free guided tour only) with 19 stained-glass windows showing the livery companies' coats of arms.

The **Guildhall Clock Museum** (admission free; ⏲ 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Fri) charts 500 years of timekeeping with over 700 ticking exhibits, and the **Guildhall Art Gallery** (☎ 7332 3708; admission £2.50) displays around 250 artworks, the most significant of which is John Singleton Copley's masterpiece *The Defeat of the Floating Batteries at Gibraltar; September 1782.*

BARBICAN

Like Marmite, you either love or hate the concrete **Barbican** (Map p125; ☎ 7638 4141; Silk St EC2; ⊖ Barbican or Moorgate). It's true that it is extraordinarily ugly in many ways, with forbidding high-rise tower blocks (romantically named Shakespeare, Cromwell and Lauderdale), gloomy raised walkways and tunnels, and apartment blocks that valiant window boxes attempt to prettify. But at the time, this vast complex of offices and residences with an arts centre at its heart was revolutionary, designed to fill the WWII bomb-splattered space with democratic modern housing by disciples of Le Corbusier, Chamberlain, Powell and Bon. Sadly this democratic dream never really materialised, and today around 80% of the flats are privately owned. It's been fashionable to loath the Barbican in the past, but in 2001 the complex became listed, so its detractors will just have to live with it.

The Barbican Centre (p174) is the home of the London Symphony Orchestra. It also houses the Museum of London and the wonderful **Barbican Art Gallery** (☎ 7638 8891; admission £8.50; ⏲ 11am-8pm Mon, Wed, Fri-Sun, to 6pm Tue & Thu) on Level 3, with some of the best photographic exhibits in London. The programmes are generally first-rate, as long as you can find them. There's also a free gallery on Level 0 called the **Curve Gallery**.

MUSEUM OF LONDON

Explore the tunnels of the Barbican heading for gate 7 to reach the fascinating **Museum of London** (Map p125; ☎ 0870 444 3851; www.museumoflondon.org.uk; London Wall EC2; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; ⊖ Barbican) and a journey through London's history from the big bang to broadband. Its ever-expanding exhibitions include the new Medieval Galleries and a life-size, slightly pongy Anglo-Saxon long house – for health and safety reasons they had to use fermented straw instead of dung to get an authentic whiffiness. The downstairs will be undergoing a complete redesign between 2007 and 2009 but the Roman, Medieval and prehistoric collections will remain open.

TOWER OF LONDON

One of the most essential sights to see in London, the **Tower of London** (Map p125; ☎ 7680 9004; www.hrp.org.uk; Tower Hill EC3; adult/child £15/9.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Sun & Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat; ⊖ Tower Hill) is a window into a gruesome, fascinating history. It is also one of the city's three World Heritage Sites (joining Westminster Abbey and Maritime Greenwich).

To help get your bearings, take the hugely entertaining and free guided tour with any of the Tudor-garbed Beefeaters. Hour-long tours leave every 30 minutes from the Middle Tower between 9am and 3pm Tuesday to Saturday and from 10am Sunday and Monday.

In 1078 William the Conqueror laid the first stone of the White Tower to replace the timber-and-earth castle he'd already built here. By 1285 two walls with towers and a moat were built around it and the medieval defences have barely been altered since. A former royal residence, treasury, mint and arsenal, it became most famous as a prison when Henry VIII moved to Whitehall Palace in 1529 and started dishing out his preferred brand of punishment.

The most striking building is the huge **White Tower**, with its solid Romanesque architecture and four turrets, which today houses a collection from the Royal Armouries. On the 2nd floor is the **Chapel of St John the Evangelist**, dating from 1080 and therefore the oldest church in London.

On the small green in front of the church stood Henry VIII's **scaffold**, where seven people were beheaded, including Anne Boleyn and her cousin Catherine Howard (his second and fifth wives).

To the north is the **Waterloo Barracks**, which now contains the Crown Jewels. On the far side of the White Tower is the **Bloody Tower**, where the 12-year-old Edward V and his little brother were held 'for their own safety' and later murdered, probably by their uncle, the future Richard III. Sir Walter Raleigh did a 13-year stretch here, when he wrote his *History of the World,* a copy of which is on display.

On the patch of green between the Wakefield and White Towers you'll find the latest in the tower's long line of famous ravens, which legend says could cause the White Tower to collapse should they leave. Their wings are clipped in case they get any ideas.

TOWER BRIDGE

London was still a thriving port in 1894 when Tower Bridge was designed to rise and allow ships to pass through. It is raised electronically these days but you can still see the original steam engines. There are excellent views from the walkways.

For the **Tower Bridge Experience** (Map p125; ☎ 7940 3984; www.towerbridge.org.uk; adult/child £5.50/3; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar; ⊖ Tower Hill), a lift takes you up from the modern visitors' facility in the northern tower where the story of its building is recounted with videos and animatronics. If you're coming from the Tower you'll pass through Dead Man's Hole where corpses were retrieved from the Thames after they'd been chucked from the prison.

ST KATHARINE DOCKS

A centre of trade and commerce for 1000 years, **St Katharine Docks** (Map p125) is now a buzzing waterside area of boats and eateries. **Ivory House** (built 1854) used to store ivory, perfume and other precious goods; the façade of **International House** (built 1983) is a replica of the original warehouse; **Dickens Inn** has its original 18th-century timber framework and is a popular boozer. There are free concerts on **Marble Quay** at lunchtimes or you can just mooch around looking at the historic vessels and snazzy yachts.

BANK OF ENGLAND MUSEUM

Guardian of the country's financial system, the Bank of England was established in 1694 when the government needed to raise some cash to support a war with France. It was moved here in 1734 and largely renovated by Sir John Soane. The **museum** (Map p125; ☎ 7601 5545; www.bankofengland.co.uk; Bartholomew Lane EC2; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ Bank) traces the history of the bank and banknotes with various interactive technology, and isn't quite as dry as it sounds.

THE MONUMENT

Designed by Christopher Wren to commemorate the Great Fire of 1666, the **Monument** (Map p125; ☎ 7626 2717; Monument St EC3; adult/child £2/1; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm; ⊖ Monument) is 60.6m high, the exact distance from its base to the bakery on Pudding Lane where the blaze began. Climb the 311 tight spiral steps (not advised for claustrophobics) for an eye-watering view from beneath the symbolic vase of flames.

South of the Thames

The southern part of central London used to be the city's forgotten underside – run-down and offering little for foreign visitors. But there are now pockets of refurbishment and revitalisation, as exemplified by the Design Museum, up-and-coming Bermondsey St and enticing Bermondsey Market (see p177).

BERMONDSEY

Design Museum

The whiter-than-white **Design Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 833 9955; www.designmuseum.org; 28 Shad Thames SE1; adult £7; ⏲ 10am-5.45pm; ♿; ⊖ Tower Hill) is a must for anyone interested in the evolution of design and all its applications. The permanent collection Designing Modern Britain has varying displays and there are a number of temporary exhibitions including Designer of the Year, for which the prize is an impressive £25,000. Feeling inspired?

SOUTHWARK

An important thoroughfare during the Middle Ages, Southwark (suth-erk) has almost lost its working-class gritty edge in the wake of sights and attractions such as the magnificent Tate Modern, and the modern More London site, home to offices, open-air exhibitions and dazzling City Hall.

City Hall

The Norman Foster–designed, wonky-egg-shaped **City Hall** (Map p125; ☎ 7983 4000; www.london.gov.uk; The Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; ⏲ 9am-6pm) is an architectural feast of glass, and home to the mayor, the London Assembly and the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Visitors can see the mayor's meeting **chamber** and attend **debates** (see website for timings). On one Saturday a month the 9th floor is opened for an even better view, accessed via a glass winding ramp similar to the one in Berlin's Reichstag.

HMS Belfast

Launched in 1938, the **HMS Belfast** (Map p125; ☎ 7407 6328; Morgan's Lane, Tooley St SE1; adult/child £8.50/free; 🕐 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb; ⊖ London Bridge) took part in the D-day landings and saw action in Korea. Explore the nine decks and see the engine room, gun decks, galley, chapel, punishment cells, canteen and dental surgery.

London Dungeon

Kids love the **London Dungeon** (Map p125; ☎ 7403 7221; www.thedungeons.com; 28-34 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £14.95/11; 🕐 9.30/10/10.30am-5/5.30pm depending on school holidays; ⊖ London Bridge). It's all spooky music, ghostly boat rides, fake blood and actors dressed up as gory criminals or torturers – beware the interactive bits.

Britain at War Experience

You can pop down to the London Underground air-raid shelter, look at gas masks and ration books, stroll around Southwark during the Blitz and learn about the battle on the home front at the **Britain at War Experience** (Map p125; ☎ 7403 3171; www.britainatwar.co.uk; 64-66 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £9.50/4.85; 🕐 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar). This place is crammed with fascinating memorabilia from London during WWII.

Old Operating Theatre Museum & Herb Garret

One of London's most genuinely gruesome attractions is the **Old Operating Theatre Museum** (Map p125; ☎ 7955 4791; www.thegarret.org.uk; 9A St Thomas St SE1; adult/child £4.95/2.95; 🕐 10.30am-4.45pm; ⊖ London Bridge). The primitive surgical tools of the 19th century are terrifying. Check out the recently added animal medicine section.

There's also an apothecary where medicinal herbs were stored; it now houses a medical museum hung with bunches of herbs.

Southwark Cathedral

Although the central tower dates from 1520 and the choir from the 13th century, **Southwark Cathedral** (Map p125; ☎ 7367 6722; Montague Close SE1; admission by donation; 🕐 8am-6pm; ⊖ London Bridge) is largely Victorian. It's been scrubbed up in recent years and has a new visitor centre. Inside are monuments and details galore, including a Shakespeare memorial, and it's worth picking up one of the small guides. Catch evensong at 5.30pm Tuesday and Friday, 4pm Saturday and 3pm Sunday.

Shakespeare's Globe & Exhibition

Originally built in 1599, **Shakespeare's Globe** (Map p125; ☎ 7401 9919; www.shakespeares-globe.org; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; adult/child £9/5.50; 🕐 10am-6.30pm (last entry 5pm), 10am-5pm Oct-Apr; ⊖ London Bridge) burned down in 1613 and was immediately rebuilt. The Puritans, who regarded theatres as dreadful dens of iniquity, eventually closed it in 1642. American actor and director Sam Wanamaker fought to rebuild it last century, sadly dying before the opening night in 1997.

A visit includes a tour of the theatre, where you learn interesting snippets like where the audience used to go to the loo in the absence of lavatories (take a wild guess) and what theatre was like in Shakespeare's time, plus a fascinating exhibition on Elizabethan London and the rebuilding of the theatre.

Plays are still performed in this faithful replica with thatched open roof, and actors wear traditional costumes (made by painstaking traditional methods). See the website for upcoming performances. During summer matinee performances the guided tour visits the nearby site of Rose, Bankside's first theatre.

Tate Modern

This former power station is home to the tremendous **Tate Modern** (Map p125; ☎ information7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; 🕐 10am-6pm Sun-Thu, to 10pm Fri & Sat; ♿; ⊖ Southwark), Europe's most successful contemporary art gallery and one of the South Bank's most exciting attractions.

Following the Tate's first re-hang since opening in 2000, the permanent collection is now organised by period so you can stroll through cubism, futurism and vorticism; surrealism and surrealist tendencies; abstract expressionism and European informal art; and minimalism. The vast Turbine Hall is as dramatic as it's always been and a real highlight of any visit; and the temporary exhibitions are still enticing.

Another attraction is the view from the top-floor restaurant and café. The audio guides (£2) are worthwhile for their descriptions of selected works. There are free daily guided tours of the collection's highlights at 11am and 3pm (meet on Level 3).

SOUTH BANK

The 20th-century South Bank may not be blessed with good looks, but new glass extensions are giving the cultural and arts venues – the Royal National Theatre and the National Film Theatre – a make-over, and the London Eye remains a popular sight.

Hayward Gallery

No permanent exhibition here, but the **Hayward Gallery** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7921 0813; www.hayward-gallery.org.uk; Belvedere Rd SE1; admission prices vary; ⊖ Waterloo) showcases leading names in modern art through their video, installations, photography, collage, painting etc.

London Eye

Perched on the bank of the Thames, the British Airways' **London Eye** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 5000 600; www.ba-londoneye.com; adult/child £13/6.50, discover flight £15/7.50; 🕐 10am-8pm Jan-May & Oct-Dec, to 9pm Jun-Sep; ⊖ Waterloo) is the world's largest sightseeing wheel. (For all sorts of technical reasons it can't be called a Ferris wheel.) It was originally destined to be a temporary structure, but Londoners took the wheel to their hearts and it's now a permanent addition to the cityscape.

The 135m-tall wheel takes 30 minutes to rotate completely and it's best experienced at dusk. Discovery flights include a guide who can point out the points of interest on the 25-mile view.

This attraction is so popular that it's advisable to book your ticket online to beat the queues (you also get a 10% discount).

The London Eye also runs a 40-minute **River Cruise** (adult/child £10/5), which takes in sights like the Houses of Parliament, Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral and has multilingual commentary. Joint tickets for the London Eye and cruise are available.

London Aquarium

One of the largest in Europe, the **London Aquarium** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7967 8000; www.londonaquarium.co.uk; County Hall, Westminster Bridge Rd SE1; adult/child £11.75/8.25; 🕐 10am-6pm; ⊖ Westminster or Waterloo) has three levels of fish organised by geographical origin, but you may be peering over schoolchildren's excited heads in school holidays. Check the website for shark feeding times.

Dalí Universe

Europe's largest collection of famous artworks by the surrealist master, **Dalí Universe** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 744 7485; www.daliuniverse.com; County Hall Gallery SE1; adult/child £11/6.50; 🕐 10am-5.30pm; ♿; ⊖ Westminster or Waterloo) takes you through his work by theme: Sensuality & Femininity, Religion & Mythology, Dreams & Fantasy. **Picasso: Art of a Genius**, featuring 100 rare or unseen works, is on show here too. Tickets get you into both exhibitions.

TATE-A-TATE

To get between London's Tate galleries in style, the **Tate-to-Tate ferries** – one of which sports a Damien Hirst dot painting – will whisk you from the Millennium Pier at Tate Britain to the Bankside Pier at Tate Modern, stopping en route at the London Eye. Services run 10am to 6pm daily at 40-minute intervals. A River Roamer hop-on hop-off ticket (purchased on board) costs £7.30 (discounts available).

LAMBETH

Lambeth is the district just south of Westminster Bridge, home to a few interesting museums and Lambeth Palace, the official residence of successive archbishops of Canterbury since the 12th century.

Imperial War Museum

You don't have to be a little boy to appreciate the **Imperial War Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7416 5000; www.iwm.org.uk; Lambeth Rd SE1; admission free; 🕐 10am-6pm; ⊖ Lambeth North) and its spectacular atrium with spitfires hanging from the ceiling, rockets (including the massive German V2), field-guns, missiles, submarines, tanks, torpedoes and other military hardware. Providing a telling lesson in modern history, highlights include a re-created WWI trench and WWII bomb shelter as well as a **Holocaust Exhibition**.

Florence Nightingale Museum

The thoughtful **Florence Nightingale Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7620 0374; www.florence-nightingale.co.uk; 2 Lambeth Palace Rd SE1; adult/child £5.80/4.80; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat & Sun, last admission 1hr before closing; ♿; ⊖ Westminster or Waterloo) recounts the story of 'the lady with the lamp' who led a team of nurses during the Crimean War, and who established a training school for nurses at St Thomas's Hospital in 1859.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Earl's Court

The residents of Kensington and Chelsea have the highest incomes of any London borough (shops and restaurants will presume you do too) and the area, like the Chelsea football team, is thoroughly cosmopolitan chic. Thanks to the 1851 Great Exhibition, South Kensington is first and foremost museum land, boasting the Natural History, Science and Victoria & Albert Museums all on one road.

Further west, Earl's Court is lively and cosmopolitan, although less prosperous. It's particularly popular with travelling antipodeans and was once known as Kangaroo Valley.

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

A vast, rambling and wonderful museum of decorative art and design, the **Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ⌚ 10am-5.45pm Thu-Tue, to 10pm Wed; ⊖ South Kensington) is part of Prince Albert's legacy to Londoners in the wake of the successful Great Exhibition of 1851.

It's a bit like the nation's attic, comprising four million objects collected over the years from Britain and around the globe. Spread over nearly 150 galleries, it houses the world's greatest collection of decorative arts, including ancient Chinese ceramics, modernist architectural drawings, Korean bronze and Japanese swords, samples from William Morris' 19th-century Arts and Crafts movement, cartoons by Raphael, spellbinding Asian and Islamic art, Rodin sculptures, Elizabethan gowns and dresses straight from this year's Paris fashion shows, ancient jewellery, a 1930s' wireless set, an all-wooden Frank Lloyd Wright study, and a pair of Doc Martens. Yes, you'll need to plan.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Kids – and most adults – will lose their minds at this **museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 5725; www.nhm.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ⌚ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.50pm Sun; ⊖ South Kensington), where the main collections are divided between adjoining Life and Earth Galleries. Where once the former was full of dusty glass cases of butterflies and stick insects, there are now wonderful interactive displays on themes such as Human Biology and Creepy Crawlies. Plus there's the crowd-pulling exhibition on mammals and dinosaurs, which includes animatronic movers and shakers such as the 4m-high Tyrannosaurus Rex. The Earth Galleries are equally impressive. An escalator slithers up and into a hollowed-out globe where two main exhibits – Earthquake and the Restless Surface – explain how wind, water, ice, gravity and life itself impact on the earth.

The **Darwin Centre**, a vast education centre, houses some 22 million zoological exhibits, which can be visited by tour.

SCIENCE MUSEUM

With seven floors of interactive and educational exhibits, the **Science Museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 4455; www.sciencemuseum.org.uk; Exhibition Rd SW7; admission free; ⌚ 10am-6pm; ⊖ South Kensington) helps you discover everything from the history of the Industrial Revolution to the exploration of space. There is something for all ages, from vintage cars, old trains and antique aeroplanes to labour-saving devices for the home, a wind tunnel and flight simulator. The even more hi-tech extension, the **Wellcome Wing**, focuses on contemporary science and makes presentations on recent breakthroughs. There's also a 450-seat **IMAX cinema**.

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

Established in 1673 to provide a means for students to study medicinal plants and healing, this peaceful **garden** (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 5646; www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk; 66 Royal Hospital Rd SW3; admission £5; ⌚ noon-5pm Wed & Sun Apr-Oct, noon-5pm Tue & Thur Jul-Sep; ⊖ Sloane Sq) is one of the oldest botanical gardens in Europe and contains many rare trees and plants.

ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Designed by Christopher Wren, the **Royal Hospital Chelsea** (Map p128; ☎ 7881 5204; Royal Hospital Rd SW3; admission free; ⌚ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun; ⊖ Sloane Sq) was built in 1692 to provide shelter for ex-servicemen. Today it houses hundreds of war veterans known as Chelsea Pensioners, who are fondly regarded as a national treasure. As you wander around the grounds or inspect the elegant chapel you may see them in their winter blue coats or summer reds. The Chelsea Flower Show takes place in the hospital grounds in May.

Knightsbridge & Kensington

These are among London's poshest precincts and of particular interest to shoppers. Knightsbridge is where you'll find some of London's best-known department stores, including Harrods and Harvey Nichols, while Kensington High St has a lively mix of chains and boutiques.

KENSINGTON PALACE

Dating from 1605, **Kensington Palace** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 0870 751 5170; www.hrp.org.uk; Kensington Gardens W8; adult/child £11.50/7.50; ⌚ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb; ⊖ High St Kensington) was the birthplace of Queen Victoria in 1819 but is best known today as the last home of Princess Diana. Hour-long tours take you around the surprisingly small **Staterooms**. A collection of Princess Di's dresses is on permanent display along with frocks and ceremonial gowns from HRH and her predecessors. There's an audio tour, included in the entry fee, if you want to explore on your own.

KENSINGTON GARDENS

Blending in with Hyde Park, these **royal gardens** (Map pp120-1; ⌚ dawn till dusk) are part of Kensington Palace. There's a splendid, contemporary art space, the **Serpentine Gallery** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7402 6075; www.serpentinegallery.org; admission free; ⌚ 10am-6pm; ⊖ Knightsbridge or Lancaster Gate), south of the lake. The **Sunken Garden**, near the palace, is at its prettiest in summer, while tea in the **Orangery** (Map pp120–1) is a treat. For canine lovers there's a **Dog's Cemetery** tucked away.

On the southern edge of the gardens, opposite the Royal Albert Hall, is the restored **Albert Memorial** (Map pp120-1; ⊖ South Kensington or Gloucester Rd), as over-the-top as the subject, Queen Victoria's German husband Albert (1819–61), was purportedly humble. It was designed by George Gilbert Scott in 1872.

On the far side of the gardens is **Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground** (Map pp120–1) for kids.

Notting Hill

The status of the Notting Hill Carnival (in late August) reflects the multicultural appeal of this part of west London, into which West Indian immigrants moved in the 1950s. After decades of exploitation and strife, the community took off in the 1980s and the area is now a thriving, vibrant corner of central London that is retaining its charm despite steady gentrification.

Bayswater, to the east, was neglected for centuries, but is now mainly a fairly well-to-do residential area with Queensway as its main thoroughfare.

Hyde Park

At 145 hectares, **Hyde Park** (Map pp120-1; ⌚ 5.30am-midnight) is central London's largest open space. Henry VIII expropriated it from the Church in 1536, when it became a hunting ground and later a venue for duels, executions and horse racing. The 1851 Great Exhibition was held here and during WWII the park became an enormous potato field. These days it serves as an occasional concert venue and a full-time green space for fun and frolics. There's boating on the Serpentine for the physically energetic or, near Marble Arch, there's **Speaker's Corner** (Map pp120–1) for oratorical acrobats. These days it's largely nutters and religious fanatics who maintain the tradition begun in 1872 as a response to rioting.

A plaque on the traffic island at Marble Arch indicates the spot where the infamous Tyburn Tree, a three-legged gallows, once stood. It is estimated that up to 50,000 people were executed here between 1300 and 1783, many having been dragged from the Tower of London.

A more soothing structure, in memory of Princess Diana – a meandering stream that splits at the top, flows gently downhill and reassembles in a pool at the bottom – was unveiled here in mid-2004 with inevitable debate over matters of taste and gravitas.

MARBLE ARCH

London's grandest bedsit – with a one-room flat inside – **Marble Arch** (Map pp120-1; ⊖ Marble Arch) was designed by John Nash in 1827 as the entrance to Buckingham Palace. It was moved here in 1851.

Marylebone

Increasingly hip Marylebone is home to several attractions, from London's primo tourist haunt Madame Tussauds to the oft-overlooked artistic treasure Wallace Collection.

WALLACE COLLECTION

Housed in a beautiful, opulent Italianate mansion, the **Wallace Collection** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7563 9500; www.wallacecollection.org; Hertford House, Manchester Sq W1; admission free, audio guide £3; ⌚ 10am-5pm; ⊖ Bond St) is a treasure-trove of exquisite 18th-century French furniture, Sèvres porcelain, arms, armour and art by masters such as Rubens, Titian, Rembrandt and Gainsborough. The lovely glassed-in courtyard restaurant is popular with an older crowd. Past temporary exhibitions have included Great British Watercolours; check the website for the current schedule.

MADAME TUSSAUDS

You'll probably have to queue for **Madame Tussauds** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 999 0046; www.madame-tussauds.com; Marylebone Rd NW1; prices vary according to time of year & entry, admission including Chamber Live adult/child £24/20; ⌚ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ⊖ Baker St), you'll pay through the nose and really, how interesting is looking at celebrities made out of wax, taking part in a

TOP FIVE PLACES TO POTTER

- Portobello Rd (Map pp120–1)
- Marylebone High St (Map pp122–3)
- Brick Lane (Map p125)
- Exmouth Market (Map pp118–19)
- Hampstead (Map pp116–17)

wax X-factor or hanging out with wax serial killers? Kids seem to like it though, so if they insist, drop them off and go for a mosey down Marylebone High St.

LONDON PLANETARIUM

Attached to Madame Tussauds (and included in the admission charge), the **London Planetarium** (Map pp122-3; www.london-planetarium.com; admission £3; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) presents a 15-minute star show projected onto the dome ceiling.

Regent's Park

A former royal hunting ground, **Regent's Park** (Map pp118-19; ⊖ Baker St or Regent's Park) was designed by John Nash early in the 19th century, although what was actually laid out is only a fraction of the celebrated architect's grand plan. Nevertheless, it's a lovely space in the middle of the city – at once lively and serene, cosmopolitan and local – with football pitches, tennis courts and a boating lake. **Queen Mary's Gardens**, towards the south of the park, are the prettiest part of the gardens with spectacular roses in summer when the **open-air theatre** (☎ 7486 7905) hosts performances of Shakespeare.

LONDON ZOO

Established in 1828 and one of the world's oldest, **London Zoo** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7722 3333; www.londonzoo.co.uk; Regent's Park NW1; adult/child £14.50/11.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb; ⊖ Camden Town) got into hot water because its historical buildings weren't conducive to animal comforts. Smarting from the criticism, it embarked on a 10-year, £21-million project focusing on conservation, education and breeding programmes. Still, you'll find this zoo as thrilling or upsetting as any other. Feeding times, reptile handling and the petting zoo are always popular.

North London

The northern reaches of central London stretch in a broad arc from St John's Wood in the west to Islington in the east. Camden Market and Hampstead Heath are among north London's most popular attractions, while Islington is awash with lively pubs and eateries, and Upper St, in particular, is worth a wander.

EUSTON & KING'S CROSS

These aren't especially inviting areas and will be most familiar to users of the tube and anyone taking a train to the north of England. The area around King's Cross is a bit of a building site as the new Eurostar terminal and surrounding entertainment and residential complexes take shape.

British Library

Colin St John's new **British Library** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7412 7332; www.bl.uk; 96 Euston Rd NW1; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9.30am-8pm Tue, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; ⊖ King's Cross St Pancras), which opened in 1998, has copped some flak for its red-brick façade, but the interior is superb. You need to be a 'reader' (ie member) to use the collection of every British publication in print, but historical documents, including the Magna Carta, are on public display.

ST JOHN'S WOOD

Posh St John's Wood is where you'll find Lord's, the home of world cricket; and 3 Abbey Rd NW8, where the Beatles recorded most of their albums, including *Abbey Road* (1969) itself, with its cover shot taken on the **zebra crossing** (Map pp116–17) outside.

MCC Museum & Lord's Tour

The next best thing to watching a test at **Lord's Cricket Ground** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7616 8595; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; adult/child £8/5; tours 10am, noon & 2pm Apr-Sep, noon & 2pm Oct-Mar when there's no play; ⊖ St John's Wood) is the absorbingly anecdotal 90-minute tour of the ground and facilities, which takes in the famous (members only) Long Room and a museum featuring evocative memorabilia.

CAMDEN

Technicolour hairstyles, facial furniture, heavy tattoos and ambitious platform shoes are the look du jour in Camden, the popularity of which is largely fuelled by Camden Market (see p177), London's most popular 'unticketed' tourist attraction with an estimated 10 million visitors a year. This was a working-class Irish and Greek enclave just two decades ago but has been largely gentrified since.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

These quaint and well-heeled villages, perched on hills above central London, are home to an inordinate number of celebrities and intelligentsia. The villages are largely as they were laid out in the 18th century and boast close proximity to the vast Hampstead Heath.

Hampstead Heath

With its rolling woodlands and meadows, **Hampstead Heath** (Map pp116-17; ⊖ Hampstead, Gospel Oak or Hampstead Heath main-line station) is a million miles away – well, approximately four – from central London. A walk up **Parliament Hill** affords one of the most spectacular views of the city.

Kenwood House (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8348 1286; Hampstead Lane NW3; admission free; 🕒 11am-5pm Apr-end Oct, 11am-4pm rest of year; ⊖ Archway or Golders Green) is a magnificent neoclassical mansion on the northern side of the heath, and houses a small collection of paintings by European masters. From the station catch bus 210.

The Heath also has several swimming ponds – for the strong and hardy – with separate ponds for single-sex and mixed bathing. Once you've worked up a thirst (that's *after* your swim) there are several good pubs nearby (see p171).

Highgate Cemetery

The Victorian symbols – shrouded urns, obelisks, upturned torches (life extinguished) and broken columns (life cut short) – along with the eerily overgrown graves and the twisting paths of the western side of **Highgate Cemetery** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8340 1834; Swain's Lane N6; ⊖ Archway) weave a creepy kind of magic. From Archway station walk up Highgate Hill to Waterlow Park on the left. Stroll through the park; the gates to the cemetery are opposite the exit.

Admission to this part of the cemetery is by tour only (adult/child £3/1; 2pm Monday to Friday, on the hour 11am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday). On the other, less atmospheric side you can visit other **graves** (admission £2; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, till 3.30pm rest of yr), including those of Karl Marx and George Eliot.

Keats House

This elegant Regency **house** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7435 2062; Wentworth Pl, Keats Grove NW3; adult/child £3.50/free; 🕒 1-5pm Tue-Sun; ⊖ Hampstead) was Keats' home from 1818 to 1820, until he left for sunnier Rome to help his tuberculosis. Here he wrote *Ode to a Nightingale* and fell in love with his neighbour Fanny Brawne. Among the personal mementos are Fanny's engagement ring, love letters and old manuscripts.

TOP FIVE GREEN SPACES

- Hampstead Heath (left)
- Hyde Park (p147)
- Kew Gardens (p151)
- Regent's Park (opposite)
- St James's Park (p137)

Freud Museum

After fleeing Nazi-occupied Vienna in 1938, Sigmund Freud came to this house where he lived the last 18 months of his life. The **Freud Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7435 2002; www.freud.org.uk; 20 Maresfield Gardens NW3; adult £5; 🕒 noon-5pm Wed-Sun) contains the psychoanalyst's original couch, his books and his Greek and Asian artefacts.

East London

The eastern reaches of central London are taken up by the East End – the London of Christmas pantomimes and old Hollywood films – and the sprawl of the Docklands, where the brand new sits alongside the old and decaying.

EAST END

The East End districts of Shoreditch, Hoxton, Spitalfields and Whitechapel were traditionally working-class London, settled by waves of immigrants all of whom have left their mark. Run-down and neglected by the 1980s, pockets of it are now highly cool. There are no major attractions here, but it's a good place to experience modern, multicultural London.

Geffrye Museum

The only museum in the UK to specialise in historic domestic interiors, the **Geffrye Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7739 9893; www.geffrye-museum.org.uk; 136 Kingsland Rd E2; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; ⊖ Old St, then bus 243) is a lot more interesting than it sounds, and if you like poking around other people's houses it's positively orgasmic. You'll see oriental-inspired wallpaper and tiles in the Aesthetic style room; bright colours and carved side chairs in the Victorian room; exotic woods, brass mounts and inlays in the Regency room; Arts and Crafts–style furniture in the Edwardian room;

the gramophone and Moderne style of the 1930s; an early '60s living room complete with sideboard that looks suspiciously like ones you can buy in Habitat on Tottenham Court Rd; and the rather boring-looking style of the 1990s IKEA generation. And on top of all that interiors porn, there's a lovely walled herb garden, a design centre, shop and restaurant.

White Cube

In an industrial building with impressive glazed roof extension, **White Cube** (Map p125; ☎ 7930 5373; www.whitecube.com; 48 Hoxton Sq N1; admission free; ⏰ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat; ⊖ Old St) has an appealing programme of contemporary-art exhibitions from sculptures to video, installations and painting.

DOCKLANDS

The Port of London was once the world's greatest port, the hub of the British Empire and its enormous global trade. Since being pummelled by the Luftwaffe in WWII its fortunes have been topsy-turvy, but new development and infrastructure have seen people and tenants return in recent years.

The **Museum in Docklands** (Map p132; ☎ 7515 1162; www.museumindocklands.org.uk; Hertsmere Rd, West India Quay E17; adult/child £5/free; ⏰ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; ⊖ Canary Wharf), housed in a heritage-listed warehouse, uses artefacts and multimedia to chart the history of the Docklands from Roman trading to its renewal in the twilight of the 20th century. It's a fascinating look through the Docklands' window into Britain's past.

South London

Glamorous Greenwich is the main attraction south of London's centre but you will also have fun exploring Brixton's colourful market or visiting the excellent Horniman Museum in Forest Hill.

GREENWICH

Quaint and villagelike, delightful Greenwich (*gren*-itch) has a recharging sense of space, splendid architecture and strong connections with the sea, science, sovereigns and time. It has earned its place as a Unesco World Heritage Site and you should allow a full day to do your visit justice. All the great architects of the Enlightenment made their mark here, largely due to royal patronage, and there's an extraordinary cluster of classical buildings to explore.

The **tourist office** (Map p132; ☎ 0870 608 2000; fax 8853 4607; 2 Cutty Sark Gardens SE10; ⏰ 10am-5pm; Docklands Light Rail (DLR) Cutty Sark) has all the information you need on the area.

Cutty Sark

A famous Greenwich landmark, this **clipper** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 3445; www.cuttysark.org.uk; King William Walk SW10; admission £5; ⏰ 10am-5pm) was the fastest ship in the world when launched in 1869. It's now undergoing major restoration work (till April 2009) but you can book a hard-hat tour to meet the architects and learn about the project.

Old Royal Naval College

Walk south along King William Walk and you'll see the **Old Royal Naval College** (Map p132; ☎ 8269 4747; www.greenwichfoundation.org.uk), designed by Wren and a magnificent example of monumental classical architecture. Now used by the University of Greenwich, you can still view the **chapel** and the stunning **Painted Hall** (adult/child £5/free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which took artist Sir James Thornhill 19 years of hard graft to complete.

National Maritime Museum

Further south along King William Walk you'll come to the **National Maritime Museum** (Map p132; ☎ 8312 6565; www.nmm.ac.uk; Romney Rd SE10; admission free; ⏰ 10am-6pm), a magnificent neoclassical building by Inigo Jones, which houses a massive collection of marine paraphernalia recounting Britain's seafaring history. Exhibits range from interactive displays to old-fashioned humdingers like Nelson's tunic complete with a hole from the bullet that killed him.

Queen's House

Attached to the National Maritime Museum on its eastern side, the **Palladian Queen's House** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 4422; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm) has been restored to something like Inigo Jones' intention when he designed this place in 1616. It is a stunning exhibition venue, focusing on illustrious seafarers and historic Greenwich.

Royal Observatory

Charles II had the **Royal Observatory** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 4422; www.rog.nmm.ac.uk; Greenwich Park; admission free; ⏰ 10am-6pm) built here in 1675 to help solve the riddle of longitude. Success was confirmed in 1884 when Greenwich was designated as the prime meridian of the world, and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) became the universal measurement of standard time. On this spot you can stand with your feet straddling the western and eastern hemispheres.

If you arrive just before lunchtime, you will see a bright-red ball climb the observatory's northeast turret at 12.58pm and drop at 1pm – as it has every day since 1833, when it was introduced to allow the ships on the Thames to set their clocks. If you arrive just *after* lunchtime, you can console yourself with superb views across London or a visit to the atmospheric preserved rooms containing the actual timepieces described in Dava Sobel's *Longitude,* the bestselling book about the fascinating quest to measure longitude.

Fan Museum

Greenwich also provides the engaging **Fan Museum** (Map p132; ☎ 8305 1441; www.fan-museum.org; 12 Croom's Hill SE10; admission £3.50; ⏰ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; DLR Greenwich), housed in an 18th-century Georgian house and one of only two of its kind in the world. A fraction of the hand-held folding fans, collected from around the world and dating back to the 17th century, are on display at any one time.

Getting There & Away

Greenwich is most easily reached on the DLR; Cutty Sark is the station closest to the tourist office and most of the sights. There are fast, cheap trains from Charing Cross to Greenwich station (preferably Maze Hill) about every 15 minutes.

Alternatively come by boat. **Thames River Services** (☎ 7930 4097; www.westminsterpier.co.uk) departs half-hourly from both Westminster Pier (Map pp122–3) and Greenwich, and the trip takes approximately an hour (return £9).

AROUND GREENWICH

Millennium Dome

The public never took to the famously costly **dome** (Map p132), the centrepiece of Britain's millennium celebrations. It's now being transformed into a 20,000-seat sports and entertainment arena surrounded by shops, restaurants and affordable housing. The complex formed part of the Olympics bid, and is due to be completed by the time you read this. Maybe Londoners will like it more in its new incarnation.

FOREST HILL

Horniman Museum

Set in an Art Nouveau building with a clock tower and mosaics, **Horniman Museum** (☎ 8699 1872; www.horniman.ac.uk; 100 London Rd SE23; admission free; ⏰ 10.30am-5.30pm; ⊖ Forest Hill) has a collection of African art and sculpture, including Africa's largest mask, and a fab collection of musical instruments, which were collected by the Victorian tea-merchant Frederick John Horniman.

Turn left out of Forest Hill station along Devonshire Rd, then right along London Rd, and you'll see the Horniman on your right.

West London

KEW GARDENS

In 1759 botanists began rummaging around the world's gardens for specimens they could plant in the 3-hectare plot known as the **Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew** (☎ 8332 5655; www.rbgkew.org.uk; Kew Rd, Kew; adult/child £11.75/free; ⏰ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Sat & Sun, earlier closing in winter; ⊖ Kew Gardens). They never stopped collecting, and the gardens, which have bloomed to 120 hectares, provide the most comprehensive botanical collection on earth (including the world's largest collection of orchids) as well as a delightful pleasure garden.

First-time visitors should board the **Kew Explorer** (adult/child £3.50/1), a hop-on hop-off road train that leaves from Victoria Gate – where you will enter from if you get the tube – and takes you around the gardens' main sights.

Kew has all sorts of charms within its borders. Highlights include the enormous **Palm House**, a hothouse of metal and curved sheets of glass; the stunning **Princess of Wales Conservatory**; the red-brick, 1631 **Kew Palace** (adult/child £5/3.50; ⏰ 10am-6pm 27 Apr-30 Sep), formerly King George III's country retreat and now open following a £6.6-million restoration project; the celebrated **Great Pagoda** designed by William Chambers in 1762; and the **Temperate House**, which is the world's largest ornamental glasshouse and home to its biggest indoor plant, the 18m-high Chilean Wine Palm.

The gardens are easily reached by tube but you might prefer to cadge a lift on a riverboat from the **Westminster Passenger Services Association** (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk), which runs boats several times daily departing from Westminster Pier from April to September (return adult/child £16.50/5.25).

HAMPTON COURT PALACE

Built by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey in 1514, but coaxed out of him by Henry VIII just before the chancellor fell from favour, **Hampton Court Palace** (☎ 8781 9500; www.hrp.org.uk; adult/child £12.30/8; ⏰ 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov–mid-Mar; Hampton Court station) is the largest and grandest Tudor structure in England. It was already one of the most sophisticated palaces in Europe when, in the 17th century, Christopher Wren was commissioned to build an extension. The result is a beautiful blend of Tudor and 'restrained baroque' architecture.

Take a themed tour led by costumed historians, or if you're in a rush visit the highlights: **Henry VIII's State Apartments**, including the Great Hall with its spectacular hammer-beamed roof; the **Tudor Kitchens**, staffed by 'servants'; and the **Renaissance Picture Gallery**. Spend some time in the 60 acres of riverside gardens and get lost in the 300-year-old **maze**.

Hampton Court Palace is 13 miles southwest of central London and is easily reached by train from Waterloo station via Hampton Court station. Alternatively, you can take the 3½-hour riverboat journey from Westminster Pier (see p151).

RICHMOND PARK

London's wildest park spans more than 1000 hectares and is home to all sorts of wildlife, notably herds of red and fallow deer. It's terrific for bird-watching, rambling and cycling.

To get there from the Richmond tube station, turn left along George St, then left at the fork that leads up Richmond Hill until you come to the main entrance of Richmond Gate.

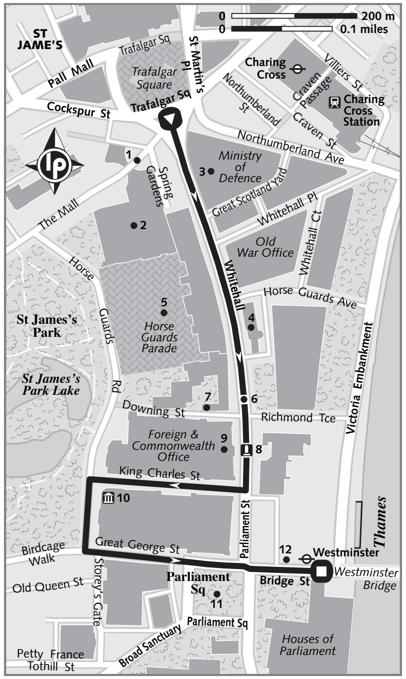
WHITEHALL WALKING TOUR

Lined with government buildings, statues, monuments and other historical sights, Whitehall (⊖ Charing Cross or Westminster), and its extension, Parliament St, is the wide avenue that links Trafalgar Sq with Parliament Sq. Whitehall was once the administrative heart of the British Empire and is still the focal point for British government.

The best way to take it all in is with the following short and leisurely stroll.

Start at the statue of King Charles, on a traffic island at the southern end of Trafalgar Sq. In front of you, you'll see the Houses of Parliament at the end of Whitehall and to your right is the 1910 **Admiralty Arch** (**1**; p134).

Walk south down Whitehall and you'll see the **Old Admiralty (2)** on your right. Further along on the left is the **Ministry of Defence (3)**, on the far side of which you'll find the **Banqueting House** (**4**; p135).



WALK FACTS

Start: King Charles statue, Trafalgar Sq
Finish: New Parliament Building
Distance: 0.5 miles
Duration: 40 minutes

On the other side of Whitehall is **Horse Guards Parade** (**5**; 🕒 parades 11am Mon-Sat, 10am Sun), where the mounted troopers of the Queens Life Guard are changed in a ceremony you'll find more accessible than the one outside Buckingham Palace. The guards have been here for 200 years. Have your picture taken next to one, but don't expect them to smile – they're on duty.

Carrying on, you'll soon see the bold **Women of World War II (6)** sculpture in the middle of the road. Unveiled on 9 July 2005 by the Queen, it commemorates the work of over seven million women in WW II. Further down on your right is **Downing Street (7)**, site of the British prime minister's official residence since 1732, when George II presented number 10 to Robert Walpole. Tony Blair and his family actually live in the larger apartments at number 11.

Whitehall becomes Parliament St and on your left you'll see the **Cenotaph (8)** – Greek for 'empty tomb' – a memorial to Commonwealth citizens killed during the two world wars.

On your right is the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office (9)**, built in 1872 and restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott and Matthew Digby Wyatt. A right turn down King Charles St will bring you to the **Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms** (**10**; p135).

Whitehall ends at **Parliament Square (11)**, watched over by statues of past prime ministers. Left along Bridge St is the ultramodern **New Parliament Building (12)**.

LONDON FOR CHILDREN

London has tons on offer for younger visitors. Apart from the obvious destinations like the London Dungeon (p144), London Zoo (p148), Madame Tussauds (p147), the Science Museum (p146), Tower of London (p142), the aquarium (p145) and the London Eye (p145), there are many playgrounds throughout the centre, a number of city farms (see www.london-footprints.co.uk/visitfarms.htm) and children are widely welcomed and catered for everywhere except pubs.

All top-range hotels offer in-house babysitting service. Prices vary enormously from hotel to hotel, so ask the concierge about hourly rates. Alternatively try www.babysitter.co.uk; membership costs £12.75 for three months, then sitters cost as little as £5.50 per hour.

TOURS

If you're short on time and big on company, the **Original London Sightseeing Tour** (☎ 8877 1722) and the **Big Bus Company** (☎ 7233 9533) offer tours of the main sights on hop-on hop-off, double-decker buses, which you'll see trundling through town. They cost adult/child £20/10 for the day, but are only worth getting if you're in town for a short stopover.

Citisights (☎ 8806 3742; www.chr.org.uk/cswalks.htm), **Historical Tours** (☎ 8668 4019), **London Walks** (☎ 7624 3978; www.walks.com) and **Mystery Tours** (☎ 07957 388 280; mysterywalks@hotmail.com) offer a variety of themed walking tours.

More imaginative and rewarding tours include the following:

Black Taxi Tours of London (☎ 7935 9363; www.blacktaxitours.co.uk; 8am-6pm £80, 6pm-midnight £85) Takes you on a two-hour spin past the major sights with a chatty cabbie as your guide.

Cabair Helicopters (☎ 8236 2400; www.cabair.com; Elstree Aerodrome, Borehamwood, Herts; tours £149) Offers 30-minute helicopter 'flight-seeing' tours over London every Sunday.

City Cruises (☎ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com; Westminster Pier SW1; cruises £9.50; 🕒 10am-4.30pm, later Jun-Aug, fewer sailings Nov-Mar) Operates a year-round ferry service from Westminster Pier to Tower Pier and Tower Pier to Greenwich in a continuous loop that allows passengers to jump on and off at various stops.

London Bicycle Tour Company (☎ 7928 6838; www.londonbicycle.com; 1A Gabriel's Wharf, 56 Upper Ground SE1; tour incl bike £16.95) Offers themed cycle tours of the 'East' and 'Royal West'.

London Duck Tours (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 3132; www.londonducktours.co.uk; departing from County Hall; adult/child £17.50/12; 🕒 10am-6pm) Uses the same sort of amphibious landing craft used on D-Day in WWII. You cruise the streets of central London before making a dramatic plunge into the Thames.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Although not renowned as a festival city, London has a few events that might influence your plans.

London Art Fair (www.londonartfair.co.uk; ☎ tickets 0870 739 9500; Business Design Centre, Islington; unlimited access £12.50) Held in January, this fair sees over 100 major galleries participating in what is now one of the largest contemporary art fairs in Europe.

Chinese New Year (www.chinatown-online.co.uk; Chinatown) Late January or early February sees Chinatown snap, crackle and pop with a colourful street parade and eating aplenty.

Chelsea Flower Show (www.rhs.org.uk; Royal Hospital Chelsea) Held in May, this is the world's most renowned horticultural show and attracts green fingers from near and far.

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (www.royalacademy.org.uk; Royal Academy of Arts) Beginning in June and running through August, this is an annual showcase of works submitted by artists from all over Britain, mercifully distilled to a thousand or so pieces.

Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships Held at the end of June, the world's most splendid tennis event is as much about strawberries, cream and tradition as smashing balls.

Pride (www.pridelondon.org) Concerts and parties rock the capital's popular gay and lesbian festival, culminating in a technicolour parade and rally in June/July.

Notting Hill Carnival (www.thecarnival.tv) Held in August, this is Europe's largest and London's most vibrant outdoor carnival, which celebrates its Caribbean community with music, dancing and costumes over the summer bank-holiday weekend.

SLEEPING

Accommodation in London can put a serious dent in your budget. Anything below £80 for a double is pretty much 'budget' in London.

Earl's Court and Victoria are best for cheaper beds while Bloomsbury has some good midrange deals. The West End has a predictable number of top-end places, and some seriously deluxe options. Most hotels now have internet access and many have rooms equipped for disabled guests.

If you're visiting in July and August consider booking at least a couple of nights in advance.

West End – Soho to the Strand

You can't get more central than this so, naturally, accommodation here comes at a price. The area specialises in deluxe hotels, many of which are tourist attractions in their own right.

BUDGET

Oxford St YHA (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 770 5984; oxfordst@yha.org.uk; 14 Noel St W1; 3- or 4-bed dm £22.60, tw per person £24.60; 💻; ⊖ Oxford Circus) It's a good idea to book this popular, supercentral hostel two weeks before arriving. There's a kitchen, TV room, balcony, laundry and PC. Since the 76 beds (31 rooms of two, three or four beds) are spread over the 4th and 5th floors of this building the views are pretty good – you can even see the London Eye from some back rooms.

MIDRANGE

Regent Palace Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 400 8703; fax 7734 6435; Piccadilly Circus, cnr Glasshouse St W1; s without bathroom/d with bathroom from £69/120; ⊖ Piccadilly) This is a practical rather than personal choice. The sights are on your doorstep but then so are an uninspiring café, Irish bar and souvenir shop in the lobby – ignore these and enjoy the delights of Soho.

Fielding Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 8305; www.the-fielding-hotel.co.uk; 4 Broad Ct, Bow St WC2; s/d from £80/100; ⊖ Covent Garden) On a quiet pedestrianised street a block away from the Royal Opera House. Space is at a premium and the décor is shop-bought but the central location is a winner.

TOP END

Hazlitt's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 1771; www.hazlittshotel.com; 6 Frith St W1; d from £205, ste £300; 💻; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Staying in this charming Georgian house, the former abode of author William Hazlitt, is a trip back in time. Each of the 23 rooms is packed with antiques and named after a personage connected with the house. There's no bar and only a small sitting room containing books signed by famous guests. Truly special.

Covent Garden Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7806 1000; www.coventgardenhotel.co.uk; 10 Monmouth St WC2; d/ste £220/350; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Covent Garden) Think antiques successfully mixed with vibrant reds, pinks and leopard print and you'll have a vision of this welcoming hotel. The colourful but cosy 1st-floor library with honesty bar is perfect for a pause and the individually designed bedrooms and marble bathrooms offer respite from busy Covent Garden. Very friendly staff too.

Courthouse Hotel Kempinski (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7297 5555; www.courthouse-hotel.com; 19-21 Great Marlborough St W1; r from £270; 🏊 wi-fi; ⊖ Leicester Sq) This is a unique opportunity to stay in an Old Magistrates Court. In the bar you can sip your G&T in a holding cell, and the Silk Thai/Indian fusion restaurant still has the witness box and judge's bench, although a Buddha now presides instead of a be-wigged old fellow. The rooms boast Italian bathrooms and comfortable fittings (and no bars on the windows). The health spa has a pool, gym and treatments.

Westminster & Victoria

Victoria may not be particularly attractive but there's a good pick of budget accommodation and the transport links are handy.

BUDGET

Astor Victoria Hostel (Map p128; ☎ 7834 3077; 71 Belgrave Rd SW1; dm from £16.50, d £25; 💻; ⊖ Victoria) This cheap and cheerful hostel has 20 mixed dorms (four- to eight-bed), eight women-only dorms (four- and six-bed), one twin room with bunk beds and only one double room so book early if you want privacy *en couple*. There are two comfortable lounges with PCs, a fully equipped kitchen and weekly dinners where you can meet other travellers over grub.

Luna & Simone Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 7834 5897; www.lunasimonehotel.com; 47-49 Belgrave Rd SW1; s/d incl breakfast from £35/70; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Victoria) The hotel ensign of Luna (the moon) and Simone (the owner) is etched into the glass porch and this personal touch continues inside with the friendly service. The blue and yellow rooms are clean and calming; the ones at the back are quieter. There's a full English breakfast and there are free storage facilities if you want to leave bags while travelling.

Hamilton House Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 7821 7113; www.hamiltonhousehotel.com; 60 Warwick Way SW1; s/d £50/60; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Victoria) Following a major refurbishment, everything in this hotel is shiny and new. The bathrooms feature lovely large showers and the compact rooms (all with en suite) are nicely decorated and contain 51cm LCD tellies. Basement rooms are a little dark.

BOOKING SERVICES

It's possible to make same-day accommodation bookings for free at most tourist offices, and **Visit London** (☎ 08456 443 010; www.visitlondonoffers.com) also has good deals.

At Home in London (☎ 8748 1943; www.athomeinlondon.co.uk) Can arrange B&B accommodation and charges percentage booking fees.

British Hotel Reservation Centre (☎ 7340 1616; www.bhrconline.com; free online booking)

Lastminute (www.lastminute.com) There are kiosks at the Britain & London Visitor Centre and Victoria station.

London Homestead Services (☎ 7286 5115; www.lhslondon.com) Charges 5% booking fee.

Uptown Reservations (☎ 7937 2001; www.uptownres.co.uk) Has centrally located self-catering apartments and B&Bs on its books.

Youth Hostels Association (YHA; ☎ 0870 870 8808; lonres@yha.org.uk) Operates its own central reservations service provided you can give them at least two weeks' notice.

Morgan House (Map p128; ☎ 7730 2384; www.morganhouse.co.uk; 120 Ebury St SW1; s/d/tr with bathroom £82/92/110, without bathroom £52/72/92, all incl breakfast; ⊖ Victoria) From the minute you enter this Georgian house you feel at home. Romantic iron beds, chandeliers, period fireplaces, a sunny little garden, sparkling bathrooms and a full English breakfast top it off.

MIDRANGE

B&B Belgravia (Map p128; ☎ 7259 8570; www.bb-belgravia.com; 64-66 Ebury St SW1; s/d from £94/99; 💻 ♿; ⊖ Victoria) This small hotel's unassuming façade belies a chic, contemporary interior comprising fireplace with flaming pebbles, chandelier with flying light bulbs, white Formica chairs and tables in an eat-in kitchen connected to the lounge via a glass bridge, innovative bathroom design, floor-to-ceiling dark wood cupboards etc. The only design blip is the easyJet-style orange staff uniform. Outside, the pretty courtyard garden is a suntrap.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia are very convenient, especially for the West End and the British Museum. Tucked away in Georgian crescent Cartwright Gardens to the north of Russell Sq, you'll find some of London's best-value hotels.

BUDGET

Generator (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7388 7666; www.the-generator.co.uk; Compton Pl, 37 Tavistock Pl WC1; dm £12.50-17, s £35, all incl breakfast; 💻 ♿; ⊖ Russell Sq) Imagine lashings of primary colours and shiny metal and you'll get an idea of this futuristic but fun hostel designed to resemble a generator. This former police barracks has long corridors housing 850 beds; a bar that stays open until 2am and hosts quizzes, pool competitions, karaoke and DJs; 24-hour internet access; safe-deposit boxes; and a large eating area but no kitchen.

Ashlee House (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 9400; www.ashleehouse.co.uk; 261-265 Gray's Inn Rd WC1; dm from £14, s £35-37, tw £23-25; ⊖ King's Cross) This hostel is a cheery surprise in a rather gritty but central location. There's a large tube map and sheepskin bench in reception, green dice tables in the small lounge, purple paint on the walls of the compact rooms, and stripy duvets on the blue bunk beds. Nearby, its sister hostel in a converted courthouse (complete with cells) was a building site at the time of writing but should be open by the time you read this; call Ashlee House if you fancy a turn behind bars.

Arran House Hotel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 2186; www.arranhotel-london.com; 77-79 Gower St WC1; dm from £18.50, s/d from £45/72; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Goodge St) Period features such as cornicing and fireplaces, a pretty pergola-decked back garden and a comfy lounge with PCs and TV lift this hotel from the average to the attractive. Slightly squashed en suite bathrooms are a small letdown (literally).

Hotel Cavendish (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 9079; www.hotelcavendish.com; 75 Gower St WC1; s/d from £50/65; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Goodge St) Following a complete refurbishment in 2006, bedrooms have a contemporary look with flat-screen LCD TVs, and all are equipped with compact en suite shower rooms (some have pretty mosaic tiles and bumper mirrors). The breakfast room is relieved of basement dinginess by a bright white lick of paint. The two gardens at the back seem to have missed out on the refurb, but are still a good place to catch some rays.

SWANK IT UP

Brown's Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7493 6020; www.roccofortehotels.com; 30 Albemarle St W1; d from £295; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Green Park) Following an 18-month refit, Brown's Hotel has a chic new look. Stay here and you're in good company – Rudyard Kipling penned many of his works here, and Kate Moss has been known to pop into the spa.

One Aldwych (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7300 1000; www.onealdwych.com; 1 Aldwych WC2; d/ste from £345/550; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Covent Garden) Granite bathrooms, long swimming pool with underwater music, US and UK electricity sockets, majestic bar and restaurant, modern art, and a lift that changes colour to literally lift your mood – this hotel has all luxuries and services covered.

Claridges (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 8860; www.savoy-group.co.uk/claridges; Brook St W1; d from £370; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Bond St) One of the greatest of London's five-star hotels and a leftover from a bygone era with original Art Deco features.

Ritz (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7493 8181; www.theritzlondon.com; 150 Piccadilly W1; d/ste from £400/600; 💻; ⊖ Green Park) London's most celebrated hotel, with opulent rooms that are popular with royalty and the cultural elite.

Ridgemount Hotel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 1141; www.ridgemounthotel.co.uk; 65-67 Gower St WC1; d with/without bathroom from £68/52; ⊖ Goodge St) This old-fashioned, slightly chintzy place has been in the same family for 40 years and has a comfortable, welcoming feel.

MIDRANGE

Jenkins Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7387 2067; www.jenkinshotel.demon.co.uk; 45 Cartwright Gardens WC1; s £52, s/d with bathroom from £72/85; ⊖ Russell Sq) This attractive hotel has featured in the TV series of Agatha Christie's *Poirot*. Rooms are on the small side but the hotel has charm.

St Margaret's Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7636 4277; www.stmargaretshotel.co.uk; 26 Bedford Pl WC1; d with/without bathroom £97/67.50; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Russell Sq) This light and airy hotel comprises four conjoined Georgian town houses; with four staircases it's easy to get lost, so keep your bearings. Many rooms used to be piano rooms and have lovely high ceilings (for better acoustics). The décor wouldn't look out of place in your granny's house, but the natural light and space are big pluses and the family who own it are welcoming.

Harlingford Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7387 1551; www.harlingfordhotel.com; 61-63 Cartwright Gardens WC1; d from £99, f £115; wi-fi; ⊖ Russell Sq) This family-run hotel sports refreshing, upbeat décor – bright-green mosaic-tiled bathrooms (with trendy bowl sinks), fuchsia bedspreads and colourful paintings. With lots of stairs and no lift, consider requesting a 1st-floor room.

TOP END

Charlotte Street Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7806 2000; www.firmdale.com; 15 Charlotte St W1; d from £230; wi-fi; ⊖ Goodge St) A favourite with media types, this place, designed with a 'Bloomsbury Set' theme, comes up with the goods: great service, stylish quarters, relaxing lounge with honesty bar, popular bar and restaurant, small gym, and screening room showing Sunday-night movies.

Clerkenwell

The availability of accommodation hasn't kept pace with Clerkenwell's revival but this is still a great area to stay in.

MIDRANGE

Zetter Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7324 4455; www.thezetter.com; 86-88 Clerkenwell Rd EC1; d from £140; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Farringdon) A slick 21st-century conversion of a Victorian warehouse. The furnishings are an enticing blend of old and new, and the facilities cutting edge – you can even choose the colour of your room's lighting (how about pink this evening?).

Malmaison (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7012 3700; www.malmaison.com; 18-21 Charterhouse Sq EC1; d from £195, weekend rates from £125; wi-fi; ⊖ Farringdon) The *Alice in Wonderland* lobby of chessboard carpet, black seats that look like pawns, endless Veuve Cliquot and supersized chairs is a quirky surprise. The rooms look more classic with contemporary fittings in neutral shades, flat-screen TVs, DVD and CD players etc. The aubergine walls are designed to quieten guests in the halls (more wonderland magic), but they look good too. A well-located hotel with a touch of pizzazz.

TOP END

Rookery (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7336 0931; www.rookeryhotel.com; Peter's Lane, Cowcross St EC1; s/d from £215/245; wi-fi; ⊖ Farringdon) Smithfield used to be an inner-city slum reportedly home to the original Fagin and Bill Sykes as well as hookers banned from the City. These seedy spots were known as rookeries, and although signs of the past remain with the butcher's name above the windows and period features inside, this discreet luxury hotel made up of six 18th- to 19th-century houses has come a long way from those smutty times. For a bird's-eye view of St Paul's and the Old Bailey book the Rook's Nest.

The City

The centrally located City is schizophrenic: manic during the week and deathly quiet at weekends, when you can often pick up good deals.

BUDGET

City of London YHA (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7236 4965; city@yha.org.uk; 36 Carter Lane EC4; dm £17.20-32; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ St Paul's) This former St Paul's Cathedral Choir Boys School is in a lovely building just notes away from the cathedral itself. It's an excellent facility with 190 beds in three- to 15-bed dorms; there's a licensed cafeteria but no kitchen.

Barbican YMCA (Map p125; ☎ 7628 0697; city.reception@cityymca.org; 2 Fann St EC2; s/d £33.95/31.95; ⊖ Barbican) No bar, no dorms, no internet but there is a gym, the rooms are mega cheap and you get to stay in a classic Barbican tower block – yes, its appeal is more architectural than aesthetic.

TOP END

Threadneedles (Map p125; ☎ 7657 8080; www.theetoncollection.com; 5 Threadneedle St EC2; d from £260 weekdays, from £110 weekends; wi-fi; ⊖ Liverpool St) The incredible stained-glass dome in the lobby points to its former status as the City Bank HQ. Today the bar and restaurant are still popular with suits, but the atmosphere is chic. At weekends this top-end spot is an absolute bargain.

Borough & Southwark

Just south of the river is good if you want to immerse yourself in workaday London, still be central and get a reasonably priced hotel.

BUDGET

Dover Castle Hostel (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7403 7773; www.dovercastlehostel.com; 6a Great Dover St SE1; dm £10-16; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Borough) This is a fairly standard hostel with kitchen, lockers (downstairs rather than in the dorm) and TV room, but it does have its own pub with a pool table and DJs till 3am, and the dorms have lots of natural light.

St Christopher's Village (Map p125; ☎ 7407 1856; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 163 Borough High St SE1; dm £16-24; 💻; ⊖ Borough) This bright and breezy hostel has a club that opens till 4am on Friday and Saturday (with karaoke, comedy and cheap drinks), a slightly dark chill-out room with big screen, table football and PCs, Belushi's restaurant and bar next door, and 172 beds, but the *pièce de résistance* is undoubtedly the roof terrace with BBQ, sauna and hot tub. Twin rooms are available. The chain has two other hostels on this street and in Camden, Shepherd's Bush and Greenwich.

MIDRANGE

Southwark Rose Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 7015 1480; www.southwarkrosehotel.co.uk; 47 Southwark Bridge Rd SE1; d weekdays £125, weekends £75, ste £190; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Borough) Popular with business travellers and with great rates for weekenders, this hotel manages to be minimalist and colourful. Neutral en suite shower rooms and metallic beds are given a boost of colour with mauve leather headboards and chairs. The suites with double room plus sofa-bed and kitchenette are a good family option. Concealed lighting in the rooms and photographs by Mayumi add a touch of style.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

Classy Chelsea and 'South Ken' offer easy access to the museums and fashion retailers. The prices are reasonable for the neighbourhood and there's a relaxing villagey vibe.

BUDGET

Holland Park (Map pp120-1; ☎ 0870 770 5866; hollandpark@yha.org.uk; Holland Walk W8; dm incl breakfast £17.20; 💻; ⊖ High St Kensington) With 200 beds, it's built into the Jacobean wing of Holland House and overlooks Holland Park. Though large, very busy and rather institutional, the position can't be beaten. There's a café and kitchen.

MIDRANGE

L'Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7589 6286; www.lhotel.co.uk; 28 Basil St SW3; d from £155; wi-fi; ⊖ Knightsbridge) Given its enviable proximity to Harrods and Harvey Nichols (p176) it's no wonder this boutique hotel is a hit with the ladies, although the mainly female staff can take some credit too.

There are 12 rooms including three deluxe and one suite, and guests can use the health spa of Carlton Towers next door – if you prefer to exercise outdoors a jogging partner will drag you around Hyde Park. Le Metro brasserie serves breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner.

TOP END

Gore (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7584 6601; www.gorehotel.com; 189 Queen's Gate SW7; s/d from £130/190; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ High St Kensington or Gloucester Rd) Features include lots of polished mahogany, Turkish carpets, antique-style bathrooms, aspidistra plants, thousands of portraits and prints, and a great bar.

myhotel Chelsea (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7225 7500; www.myhotels.com; 35 Ixworth Pl SW3; d from £206; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ South Kensington) Just around the corner from Bibendum and the shops of Fulham Rd, this hotel's location is as fabulous as its purple bar with funky chairs and bright and airy library-conservatory. The rooms sit lower down the fabulousness scale but the soft pink and grey décor is attractive and the en suite bathrooms are spacious. There's also a small gym and treatment room. If you like shopping, check out the dress agencies on Elystan St.

Earl's Court

Earl's Court is not awash with sights but it does have inexpensive digs and an infectious holiday atmosphere.

BUDGET

Barmy Badger Backpackers (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7370 5213; www.barmybadger.com; 17 Longridge Rd SW5; dm incl breakfast from £16; ⊖ Earl's Court) A basic hostel with dorm beds. There's a big kitchen and safe-deposit boxes. (There's also a YHA hostel nearby.)

easyHotel (Map pp126-7; www.easyHotel.com; 14 Lexham Gardens W8; d from £30; ⊖ Earl's Court) Much like the airline, this orange hotel operates on a no-frills basis and you have to book your room online. The rooms (all with double beds) are very compact and the en suites are only about twice as big as a plane loo, but there is a flat-screen TV. As you'd expect, there's no lounge, bar or kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Philbeach Hotel (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7373 1244; www.philbeachhotel.co.uk; 30-31 Philbeach Gardens SW5; s/d £58.50/81; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Earl's Court) In a pleasant, quiet side street, this is one of London's few gay hotels, and its interiors are predictably stylish and unique. The Thai restaurant and bar are both popular with the local gay crowd and there's a lovely garden.

base2stay (Map pp126-7; ☎ 0845 262 8000; www.base2stay.com; 25 Courtfield Gardens SW5; s/d £80/99; 💻 wi-fi ♿; ⊖ Earl's Court) This boutique hotel is excellent value. With smart décor of chocolate-brown carpets, light olive-green walls, oak wardrobes and limestone bathrooms, as well as power showers, flat-screen TV with internet access and artfully concealed kitchenettes, it feels like a four-star hotel at two-star prices.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Paddington

Bayswater is an extremely convenient location but parts west of Queensway are shady. Scruffy Paddington has lots of cheap hotels and is a handy transit point. Notting Hill is expensive in comparison, but has lots of good bars and restaurants.

BUDGET

Wake up! London (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 4471; www.wakeuplondon.co.uk; 1 Queen's Gardens W2; dm with/without bathroom £16/15, s £25/22.50, d £35/30; 💻; ⊖ Paddington) This Australian hostel has an obsession with exclamation marks preceded by the word up: the facilities are described as cook up! (kitchen), wash up! (laundry), hook up! (24-hour internet), call up! (phones), lock up! (lockers) etc. The hiccup! bar is a little on the small side considering how spacious the other communal areas are, but if the punctuation doesn't give you a headache this is a good budget option.

Stylotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7723 1026; www.stylotel.com; 160-162 Sussex Gardens W2; s/d incl breakfast £50/72; wi-fi; ⊖ Paddington) If you don't like modern design, look away now. Rooms feature glass and steel illuminated furniture, floor-to-ceiling mirrors and walls clad in aluminium. The breakfast area (full English breakfast) is a jagged comb of booths while the lounge has bright-blue sofas. You get lots of design-bang for your buck here as well as a practical location round the corner from Paddington station.

MIDRANGE

Pavilion Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 0905; www.pavilionhoteluk.com; 34-36 Sussex Gardens W2; d from £100; ⊖ Paddington) This hotel is so cluttered with animal-print chairs, velvet drapes, portraits and knick-knacks that it's amazing to think there are 30 rooms inside. Each one is themed: Casablanca Nights has a leopard-print bedspread, red Moroccan chairs and golden lanterns. It's a lot of fun if you overlook the diminutive en suite bathrooms.

TOP END

Portobello Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 2777; www.portobello-hotel.co.uk; 22 Stanley Gardens W11; d from £180; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) Imagine a wealthy aunt has invited you to stay in her London town house stuffed with antique furniture and a 24-hour bar. Other guests might include movie or music stars who love the homely but luxurious rooms and their gorgeous four-poster beds, large TVs, vintage clawfoot baths and sumptuous fabrics. If it's available, request room number 16, whose round bed with fairy-tale canopy has seen action from the likes of Johnny Depp and Kate Moss.

Hempel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7298 9000; www.the-hempel.co.uk; 31-35 Craven Hill Gardens W2; d from £275; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Bayswater) As soon as you enter the expansive all-white lobby with sunken seating areas, supermodern fireplaces, and dramatic pole and orchid ceiling-grazing flower arrangement, you know you're in for something special. It's created by Anouska Hempel and every detail is a feat of superb design, from the Zen garden to the minimalist but luxurious guestrooms and the suite with suspended caged bed.

Marylebone

Increasingly hip Marylebone has graceful Georgian squares and bustling high streets. It's within walking distance of Hyde Park and staggering distance of West End nightlife.

MIDRANGE

Edward Lear Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7402 5401; www.edlear.com; 28-30 Seymour St W1; d with/without bathroom from £89/66.50; 💻; ⊖ Marble Arch) This former home of Edward Lear has a fantastic location mere winking distance from Oxford St. The décor is a little uninspired but welcoming enough, and the staff are smiley.

Bryanston Court Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 3141; www.bryanstonhotel.com; 56-60 Great Cumberland Pl W1; d from £99; ⊖ Marble Arch) Open fireplaces, leather armchairs, creaky floors and oil paintings give this hotel a hushed and traditional English atmosphere. There are 60 pleasantly furnished rooms here, although the ones at the back are quieter and brighter. If this hotel is full, you'll sleep in the Concorde Hotel located next door.

Outside Central London

Staying outside the centre and commuting can be a drag, but these places are handy for great attractions on the outskirts.

BUDGET

Palmers Lodge (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7483 8470; www.palmerslodge.co.uk; 40 College Cres NW3; dm from £14, d & tw with/without bathroom £48/44, all incl breakfast; 💻 wi-fi ♿; ⊖ Swiss Cottage) Reminiscent of a period murder mystery (in a good way), this former nursing home has bags of character. Listed by English Heritage, who even chose the plants that flank the drive, it's stuffed with cornicing, moulded ceilings, original fireplaces and imposing wooden panelling. Ceilings are high, rooms are spacious, there's a chapel bar with pews, a kitchen with continental breakfast and a roomy lounge with flat-screen telly and free internet access.

Rotherhithe YHA (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 770 6010; rotherhithe@yha.org.uk; 20 Salter Rd SE16; dm/tw incl breakfast £15/55; 💻 ♿; ⊖ Rotherhithe) YHA's flagship London hostel is right by the River Thames and the perfect choice for anyone who's keen on Greenwich and doesn't mind being a little isolated. There are 320 rooms including 22 en suite doubles (four of them adapted for disabled visitors). There's a bar and restaurant, as well as kitchen facilities and a laundry.

MIDRANGE

Hampstead Village Guesthouse (☎ 7435 8679; www.hampsteadguesthouse.com; 2 Kemplay Rd NW3; s/d with bathroom £70/90, without £60/75; ⊖ Hampstead) Only 20 minutes by tube to the centre of London, it has rustic, antique décor and furnishings, comfy beds and a delightful back garden in which you can enjoy a cooked breakfast (if you pay the extra £7). There's also a studio flat, which can accommodate up to five people.

EATING

Dining out in London has become so fashionable that you can hardly open a menu without banging into some celebrity chef or restaurateur. Unfortunately, this doesn't automatically guarantee quality – food can be

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Aston's Apartments (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7590 6000; www.astons-apartments.com; 31 Rosary Gardens SW7; ⊖ Gloucester Rd)

Holiday Serviced Apartments (☎ 0845 060 4477; reservations@holidayapartments.co.uk)

Vancouver Studios (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7243 1270; www.vancouverstudios.co.uk; 30 Prince's Sq W2; ⊖ Bayswater) hit-and-miss regardless of price tag. In this section, we steer you towards restaurants and cafés distinguished by their location, value for money, unique features, original settings and, of course, good food.

Opening hours vary. Many restaurants in Soho close Sunday, those in the City for the whole weekend. We've tried to note where places stray from the standard 'open daily for lunch and dinner' (standard business hours are outlined on p953), but it's always safest to call and check.

Vegetarians needn't worry. London has a host of dedicated meat-free joints, while most other restaurants offer vegetarian options.

West End – Soho to the Strand

Soho is the gastronomic heart of London, with stacks of restaurants and cuisines to choose from. The liveliest streets are Greek, Frith, Old Compton and Dean Sts. Gerrard and Lisle Sts are chock-a-block with Chinese eateries.

BUDGET

Breakfast Club Café (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 2571; 33 D'Arblay St W1; toasties/jacket potatoes from £2/3.50, healthy brekkie £4.95; 💻; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Fans of the film will immediately clock this place, and if the name doesn't jog your memory the bright-yellow façade will get your attention. It's much less confronting inside with distressed floorboards, newspapers, computers with free internet access and battered signs on the walls – a chilled-out spot for a Fair Trade coffee or a snack.

Hummus Bros (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 1311; 88 Wardour St W1; meals £2.50-6 ; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ Leicester Sq) This relaxed café is hummus heaven. The scrummy stuff comes in small or regular bowls with a choice of meat and veggie toppings and a side of pitta bread. You can read about the founder's hummus obsession in the loo.

Food for Thought (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0239; 31 Neal St WC2; mains from £3.20; ⊖ Covent Garden) A classic old vegetarian joint that's big on sociability and flavour but small on price and space. Food ranges from soups to traditional Indian *thalis* (all-you-can-eat mixed plates).

Neals Yard Salad Bar (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 3233; Neal's Yard WC2; salads £3.50-4; ⊖ Covent Garden) Occupying both sides of the courtyard, this bright-orange salad bar serves fresh leafy meals and moist cakes.

Café in the Crypt (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7839 8362; St Martin-in-the-Fields, Duncannon St WC2; mains £6-7.50; 🕐 closed Sun; ⊖ Charing Cross) An atmospheric crypt complete with tombstones underfoot and top nosh on your plate. Lunchtime is frantic.

Abeno Too (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7379 1160; 47 Great Newport St WC2; okonomi-yaki £7; ⊖ Leicester Sq) Specialists in *okonomi-yaki,* which is cooked in front of you on a hotplate and looks a bit like omelette. Sit at the bar or by the window and feast. Japanese noodle dishes are also available.

MIDRANGE

Yauatcha (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7494 8888; 15 Broadwick St W1; dim sum £3-24; ⊖ Oxford Circus or Piccadilly Circus) Restaurants don't come much cooler than this. The glass-fronted exterior has just enough transparent sections to tempt you in without revealing anything. With a starlight ceiling, multicoloured tea-lights in the brick-lined walls, low green seating and the out-of-this-world fish-tank bar you could be forgiven for mistaking the dim-sum restaurant downstairs for a Tokyo nightclub. The menu is fantastic – try the Cheung Fun. Upstairs the chilled-out teahouse serves pretty cakes.

Imli (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 4243; 167-169 Wardour St W1; dishes £4-5.25; ⊖ Oxford Circus) This baby of Mayfair's Tamarind does a good job of Asian street food. The helpful staff recommend you order two or three dishes each to have a full meal. There's a lot of orange going on in the décor but it works.

Mildreds (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7494 1634; 45 Lexington St W1; mains £5.50-7.50; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) Even dedicated carnivores will love the wholesome vegetarian fare served up here. You can't book, so turn up early and don't be afraid to share a table.

Sarastro (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0101; 126 Drury Lane WC2; mains £7.50-15.50; ⊖ Covent Garden) This Mediterranean restaurant is gaudy and kitsch and loads of fun. The opera theme – with gold everywhere (even the ceiling), crushed velvet and myriad lamps – is totally over the top but the balcony tables are a scream. Good for pre- and post-theatre meals.

Wolseley (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7499 6996; 160 Piccadilly W1; mains £7.50-18.50; ⊖ Piccadilly) Most customers here are checking to see if their co-diners are as impressive as the building. And the Grade-II listed former showroom for Wolseley cars is certainly stunning but the food and service do not always live up to their price tag. We advise coming for a drink and light bite, to soak up the ambience and pose.

Kettners (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 6112; 29 Romilly St W1; mains £8.25-19.50; ⊖ Leicester Sq) A gem, serving mouthwatering pizzas and burgers, which you can wash down with champagne while soaking in the gently fading grandeur and tinkling piano.

Spiga (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 3444; 84-86 Wardour St W1; mains from £8.50, set menu 2/3 courses £15.50/19.50; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) With Italian movie posters on the walls, warm, colourful décor and a tasty menu of pastas, pizzas, fish and meat dishes, this popular restaurant is a winner.

Ping Pong (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7851 6969; 45 Great Marlborough St W1; mains £8.50-15.50; ⊖ Covent Garden) Prepare to queue outside this chic but cheery dim-sum joint (you can't book). Grab a table or perch at the semicircular bars and mark up your dim-sum menu (a novel but effective ordering approach). It's all good but the Char Sui Bun and the Har Gau are particularly tasty and the jasmine tea has an exploding flower. The loos take the sleek look to a new level with a touch-in touch-out system.

Joe Allen (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0651; 13 Exeter St W1; mains £8.50-15.50; ⊖ Covent Garden) This favourite with theatregoers and thespians has a daily menu of modern American dishes, photos of performers plastering the brick-lined walls, a piano-player in the evenings, jazz on Sunday and buckets of atmosphere. Burgers aren't on the menu but they serve them if you ask.

Gay Hussar (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 0973; 2 Greek St W1; mains £9.50-16.50; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Founded in 1953 and looking pretty much as it did then, this old-style Hungarian eatery is a Soho institution. It's popular with politicians, and the walls are covered with cartoons of famous bods who've dined here. The rich, authentic, meaty dishes are colossal. Try the veal goulash or the crispy roast duck.

TOP END

Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 4756; 11-15 Swallow St W1; oysters £9.50-26, mains £13.50-29.50; ⊖ Leicester Sq) Bentley's has been here since 1916 but the new owner, award-winning chef Richard Corrigan, has gutted and refurbished it to give it a new lease of life. The oyster bar's look is classic with a modern twist: wood panelling is painted charcoal grey, punters perch on high red leather chairs by the marble-topped bar, and stripy seats cluster around low wood tables. It's fun and inviting. There's a more formal dining room upstairs.

Sketch (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 777 4488; 9 Conduit St W1; Gallery mains from £12, Lecture Room mains £50-75; ⊖ Oxford Circus) A design enthusiast's wet dream with shimmering white rooms, designer Louis XIV chairs and toilet cubicles shaped like eggs. And that's just the downstairs video art gallery, which becomes a buzzy restaurant at night, then a funky club after midnight. There's also the Glade daytime restaurant, a ground-floor Parlour tearoom and the Lecture Room upstairs which has a six-course tasting menu for £90.

MEAL COSTS

Our pricing categories for London are per person for a two-course dinner and a drink. You'll pay much less for lunch.

- Budget – under £15
- Midrange – £15 to £40
- Top End – over £40

Floridita (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7314 4000; 100 Wardour St W1; mains £13.50-27.50; ⊖ Leicester Sq) Cuban cuisine, Latin beats, sexy black mirrored walls, cream leather seating, cigar girls… Floridita brings a glossy Havana to Soho. If the Cuban bands and DJs don't make you hit the dance floor, the cocktails will. For those who just want to salsa, entry is free before 10pm. Cuban lobster (flown over in blocks of ice to be kept alive but sleepy) is the restaurant's signature dish.

Rules (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 5314; 35 Maiden Lane WC2; mains £16-20; ⊖ Covent Garden) Established in 1798, this is London's oldest restaurant and specialises in classic game cookery, serving some 18,000 birds a year. Despite the history, it's not a museum piece and its sustained vitality attracts locals as well as the tourist masses.

Westminster, Pimlico & St James's

There's very little action around these parts at night, although the following restaurants are worth a short detour in themselves.

BUDGET

Chocolate Society (Map p128; ☎ 7259 9222; 36 Elizabeth St SW1; mains £5-7; ⊖ Victoria) Now we're not suggesting woman (or man) can survive on chocolate alone, but this supercharming Parisian-style café tests the theory with mounds of the stuff in glass jars, ribbon-tied bags and cute tins. A hot chocolate will set you back £3.50 but knowing they support traditional production methods and ethical farming makes it taste all the sweeter.

Jenny Lo's Tea House (Map p128; ☎ 7259 0399; 14 Eccleston St SW1; noodle dishes £6.50-8; ⊖ Victoria) A

TOP FIVE BRUNCH SPOTS

- Al's Bar & Café (p165)
- Canteen (right)
- Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen (opposite)
- Providores (p165)
- Wolseley (p160)

simple, popular Asian place that serves soups and rice dishes, but specialises in noodles and other wok-based specials.

MIDRANGE

Thomas Cubitt (Map p128; ☎ 7730 6060; 44 Elizabeth St SW1W; bar meals £6-12.50; ⊖ Victoria) Named after the area's prolific architect Mr Cubitt, this boozer has gone posh in a delightfully unfussy way, with smart National Trust–type paint on the panelling and a beautiful glazed front which opens up in summer. Try the slow-cooked pork belly on toast. Upstairs the menu gets pricey.

TOP END

Tamarind (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 3561; 20 Queen St W1; mains £13-24, 2-/3-course set lunch £17/19; ⊖ Green Park) London's only Michelin-starred Indian restaurant serves up mouthwatering spicy classics in a simple, chic dining room.

Luciano (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7408 1440; 72-73 St James's St SW1; mains £8-21.50; ⊖ St James) On the site of Madame Prunier's early-20th-century fashionable fish restaurant, Marco Pierre White goes back to his roots with classic Italian dishes at this spacious dining room with Art Deco touches. The portions are as generous as the space, so it's probably best to skip breakfast (and lunch if you're coming in the evening).

Cinnamon Club (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7222 2555; Old Westminster Library, 30 Great Smith St W1; mains from £20; ⊖ St James's Park) The domed skylights, high ceilings, parquet flooring and book-lined mezzanine evoke the Westminster Library this restaurant used to be. Head downstairs and the vibe is altogether funkier, with rubber floor, leather chairs and Indian films projected on the walls. Enjoy a drink before dining on elegant Indian cuisine.

Hoxton, Shoreditch & the City

From the hit-and-miss Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants of Brick Lane to the trendy eateries of Hoxton and Shoreditch, the East End has finally made it onto London's culinary map. City restaurants that stay open late are harder to find.

BUDGET

Brick Lane Beigel Bake (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7729 0616; 159 Brick Lane E2; most bagels less than £1; 🕑 24hr; ⊖ Liverpool St) A relic of London's Jewish East End, it's more of a takeaway than a café and sells the cheapest bagels anywhere in London. You only get what you pay for, but they're a good snack on a bellyful of booze.

Leon (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7489 1580; Ludgate Circus EC4; big dishes £4.90-5.70; 💻 wi-fi; ⊖ St Pauls) Voted best new restaurant, takeaway and bar by the *Observer* panel (which included culinary kings Gordon Ramsay and Rick Stein), this self-proclaimed natural fast-food joint serves delights from the Med such as Moorish Vegetable Tagine. Choose between red metal chairs, sink-in-me sofas or silver bar stools and dig into your cardboard box…

Story Deli (Map p125; ☎ 7247 3137; 3 Dray Walk E1; pizzas £6.50-9; ⊖ Liverpool St) This organic café with mismatched cutlery poking out of jam jars, vintage mirrors leaning haphazardly against walls, high ceilings and solid wooden furniture (mismatched of course) is justifiably popular with the trendy workers of the Truman Brewery. The salmon and mascarpone pizza is to die for. It also serves burgers, sandwiches, pies and puddings.

Le Taj (Map p125; ☎ 7247 4210; 134 Brick Lane E1; mains £6.50-9.50; ⊖ Liverpool St) Among the hordes of curry houses on Brick Lane, this purple-fronted Bangladeshi restaurant is a good choice. The three-course lunch for £6.95 is a bargain.

MIDRANGE

Real Greek (Map p125; ☎ 7739 8212; 14-15 Hoxton Market N1; mezedes £1.75-6.25, mains £14.50-16.55; ⊖ Old St) Set in Hoxton Market, this popular restaurant is split into Mezedopolio – whose memorial tablets on the wall reveal its previous life as a mission, and which serves *mezedes* (small meze) – and a restaurant specialising in innovative Greek cuisine. Go for Hellenic Happy Hour between 3pm and 6pm and bag an outdoor table. If the place looks familiar, you're thinking of the fight scene from the film *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Canteen (Map p125; ☎ 0845 686 1122; 2 Crispin Pl E1; mains £7-12.50; ⊖ Liverpool St) This hip new joint by Spitalfields Market has a modern British seasonal menu with additive-free meat, fresh fish and lip-smacking pies, modernist wooden tables and benches (as the name suggests), a charmingly effervescent manager, perfect people-watching windows and outdoor tables. Try the eggs Benedict – it's divine.

Hoxton Apprentice (Map p125; ☎ 7749 2828; 16 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £7-17, set lunch 1/2 courses £7/10; ⊖ Old St) Set up by charity Training for Life to give unemployed people a vocation, this restaurant in a Victorian Grade-II listed former primary school is staffed by professionals and apprentices. The delicious modern fusion dishes, devised by Prue Leith, are served in a stylish dining room overlooked by a glassed-in mezzanine. Outdoor tables make prime people-spotting territory.

Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen (Map p125; ☎ 7613 0709; 2/4 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £7.50-14; ⊖ Old St) The grey concrete interior gives this place a cool, chilled-out vibe and the outdoor tables are fab year-round thanks to the heaters. While it's happening in the evening, with people coming for bevvies, a bite or a gig, this is a top brunch spot too.

TOP END

Fifteen (Map p125; ☎ 0871 330 1515; 15 Westland Pl N1; mains £11-26; 🕑 booking line 9.30am-9pm; ⊖ Old St) It can only be a matter of time before Jamie becomes Sir Jamie, and Fifteen was where all his culinary philanthropy started. It was set up to give unemployed young people a shot at a career; disadvantaged kids are trained on the job and all profits go to the Fifteen foundation. Book a table and if he's not cooking for an A-list friend in Hollywood, you may even glimpse the cheeky chappy himself.

Southwark, Bermondsey & Lambeth

This part of south London has a surprising number of good-value eateries.

BUDGET

Stoney Street Café (Map p125; ☎ 7407 6221; 8 Stoney St SE1; most dishes around £4; ⊖ London Bridge) This quirky café in a converted garage opposite Borough Market serves up fresh comfort food such as fish finger in a roll, burgers, soup, salad and heaps of different sausages. You can also buy homemade pickles and preserves from Scotland and a book by the scriptwriter for radio classic *The Archers*.

Mesón Don Felipe (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 3237; 53 The Cut SE1; tapas £2-5.25; ⊖ Waterloo) Tops for tapas and authentic Spanish atmosphere, helped along by classical Spanish guitar in the evenings. There are about half a dozen vegetarian options, more than you would get in Spain.

Konditor & Cook (Map p125; ☎ 7407 5100; 10 Stoney St SE1; most dishes around £5; ⊖ London Bridge) The original location of arguably the best bakery in London, serving excellent hot and cold lunches. There's not much space but everything is yours to take away. There's a larger branch in the Curzon Soho (p175).

MIDRANGE

Tas (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 1444; 33 The Cut SE1; casseroles £8.75; ⊖ Southwark) This restaurant is an outstanding Turkish place with plush surroundings, tasty kebabs and an impressive range of vegetarian fare. Order a casserole and you'll see a *tas* first-hand – it's the Anatolian cooking pot used to stew this tasty dish.

Delfina (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7357 0244; 50 Bermondsey St SE1; mains £10-15; 🕑 noon-3pm Mon-Fri; ⊖ London Bridge) This restaurant-cum-art-gallery in a converted Victorian chocolate factory serves delicious modern cuisine with an Asian twist, to a backdrop of contemporary canvases. Studios upstairs house artists, and there's an exhibition space downstairs showing more works.

Livebait (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 7211; 43 The Cut SE1; mains £10-21; ⊖ Southwark) The old fishmongers décor with brick tiles, wooden floors and dark wood tables sets an authentic, relaxed tone in this popular seafood bar and fish restaurant. You can get a special lunch for £7.75 and there's a pretheatre menu for £14.50 (two courses) or £18.50 (three courses). All the fishy dishes are yummy; for a good taster order the classic platter with crab, crevettes, prawns, oysters, cockles, whelks and mussels.

Blue Print Café (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7378 7031; Design Museum, Butlers Wharf, Shad Thames SE1; mains £12.50-21.50; ⊖ Tower Hill) With spectacular views of the river and an ever-changing menu of modern European cuisine, this restaurant by Sir Terence Conran is perfect for a bite before or after visiting the Design Museum.

TOP END

Oxo Tower Restaurant & Brasserie (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7803 3888; Barge House St SE1; mains £9-14.75; ⊖ Waterloo) Offers good grub – a bit Mediterranean, a bit French, some Pacific Rim – and is all about special-event dining. There are splendid views over the Thames and St Paul's Cathedral. This price guide is for the slightly cheaper brasserie. If you're not hungry but fancy checking out the view, head to the bar.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

The menus tip towards the pricey end in these three gastronomic areas but you can find budget eats if you're not in the market for Michelin stars.

BUDGET

New Culture Revolution (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 9281; 305 King's Rd SW3; mains around £7; ⊖ Sloane Sq) This is a trendy, good-value dumpling and noodle bar.

Jakobs (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7581 9292; 20 Gloucester Rd SW7; meals around £10; ⊖ Gloucester Rd) A charismatic café-delicatessen serving a mixture of Armenian, Persian and Mediterranean dishes, including salads, falafel and quiches, that treat your palate without upsetting your purse.

MIDRANGE

Nozomi (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7838 1500; 15 Beauchamp Pl SW3; yakitori £3.50-14.50, tempura £6.20-29; ⊖ Knightsbridge) On the distinctly well-heeled Beauchamp Pl, Nozomi's visitors ascend marble steps under a black awning to enter this minimalist restaurant serving tasty Japanese cuisine.

Made in Italy (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 1880; 249 King's Rd SW3; pizzas £5.70-10.50; ⊖ Sloane Sq) Family-run and convivial, with the best pizzas for miles, Made in Italy is as close as you'll get to southern Italy without needing your passport.

Wódka (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7937 6513; 12 St Alban's Grove W8; mains £12.50-15.50; ⊖ High St Kensington) Authentic Polish and Eastern European cuisine in Kensington Palace's old dairy. The menu changes monthly and there are daily specials. In the winter try the warming Polish hunter's stew and wash it down with vodka (obviously) fresh from the deep freeze.

Boxwood Café (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7235 1010; Berkeley Hotel, Wilton Pl SW1; mains £13-18; ⊖ Knightsbridge) A New York–style café set up by superchef Gordon Ramsay in a valiant attempt to kick back with young folk and make fine dining in London 'a little bit more relaxed'. The décor is a little dreary but the food first-rate.

TOP FIVE ALMOST ALTRUISTIC EXPERIENCES

- Chocolate Society (p161)
- Fifteen (p163)
- Hoxton Apprentice (p163)
- Made in Clerkenwell (p178)
- Planet Organic (opposite)

TOP END

Nobu (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7447 4747; Metropolitan Hotel, 19 Old Park Lane W1; mains £5-28; ⊖ Hyde Park Corner) Very popular with celebrities wearing black, this place feels like a London designer's idea of a Japanese restaurant. It's nonetheless a strong contender for the best Asian food in town. Comfortably minimalist, anonymously efficient and out of this world when it comes to exquisitely prepared and presented sushi and sashimi.

Bibendum (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7581 5817; 81 Fulham Rd SW3; mains £10.50-28.50; ⊖ South Kensington) Another Sir Terence Conran establishment, it's in one of London's finest settings for a restaurant – the Art Nouveau Michelin House (1911). The popular Bibendum Oyster Bar (£9.50 to £10 for half a dozen) is on the ground floor at the heart of the architectural finery. Upstairs is lighter and brighter.

Awana (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7584 8880; 85 Sloane Ave SW3; mains £12.50-24.50; ⊖ South Kensington) This wood-clad Malaysian restaurant has a small satay bar (£7 to £9.50), a varied menu offering grills, curries and stir-fries, and a cool bar area with marble tables and red leather stools.

Tom Aikens (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7584 2003; 43 Elystan St SW3; set lunch menu £29; à la carte without drinks £60; ⊖ South Kensington) Tom Aikens is the name of the notorious kitchen firebrand who runs this wonderful modern European restaurant where the setting is handsome and the food delish.

Gordon Ramsay (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 4441; 68-69 Royal Hospital Rd SW3; set lunch/dinner £40/90; ⊖ Sloane Sq) One of Britain's finest restaurants and the only one in the capital with three Michelin stars. The food is, of course, blissful and perfect for a luxurious treat. The only quibble is that you don't get time to linger. Bookings are made in specific eat-it-and-beat-it time slots and, if you've seen the chef on TV, you won't argue.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Marylebone

Notting Hill teems with good places to eat, from cheap takeaways to atmospheric pubs and restaurants worthy of the fine-dining tag.

BUDGET

Sausage & Mash Café (Map pp120-1; ☎ 8968 8898; 268 Portobello Rd W10; mains £5.75-8; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) Takes the British favourite of bangers and mash to new levels. There is not just a choice of different sausages, as you'd expect, but also variations of creamy mounds of mash and even gravy in this S&M club that won't give your wallet a spanking.

Geales (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 7528; 2 Farmer St W8; fish & chips £10; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) A popular fish restaurant that's more expensive than your average chippy (prices vary according to weight and season), but worth every penny.

MIDRANGE

Providores (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 6175; 109 Marylebone High St W1; tapa room £2.80-13.60; ⊖ Baker St or Bond St) Named after the Pacific ceremonial cloth hanging on the wall, the tapa room downstairs is a sociable place with leather bench seats and excellent coffee. Try French toast stuffed with banana and pecans with grilled smoked streaky bacon and vanilla verjus syrup for Sunday brunch. Upstairs the dining room serves exquisite New Zealand treats at higher prices.

La Fromagerie Café (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 0341; 2-4 Moxon St W1; mains £6-12.40; ⊖ Baker St) This place is just like food writer and owner Patricia Michelson's own kitchen, with bowls of delectable salads, antipasto and peppers scattered about the long communal table. Huge slabs of bread invite you to tuck in, and all the while the heavenly waft from the cheese room beckons. Sensational food, smiley service, sensible prices.

Electric Brasserie (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7908 9696; 191 Portobello Rd W11; mains £9-28; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) The leather and cream look is suitably cool for the brasserie that's attached to the Electric Cinema. And the food's very good too; head to the back area for a darker, moodier dinner.

Food @ the Muse (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7792 1111; 269 Portobello Rd W11; mains £12-15; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate). Developed 'for artists by artists', this smart, small restaurant uses its bright, white walls as the perfect blank canvas for the art that graces them. Enjoy succulent dishes like soy and honey Barbary duck breast and wait for inspiration to strike.

Villandry (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7631 3131; 170 Great Portland St W1; mains £12.50-19.50; ⊖ Great Portland St) Resist the foodstore's tempting cheese, ham, Spanish tortas, pickles and other goodies (for the moment anyway) and enter a simple, attractive dining room at the back with a tasty modern European menu that changes daily.

TOP END

E&O (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 5454; 14 Blenheim Cres W11; dim sum £3-8.50, mains £6-13.50; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate or Ladbroke Grove) This Asian bar and restaurant is a Notting Hill favourite. The black of the façade continues inside with lots of dark wood and brown leather stools – it's sleek and stylish. Dim sum at the bar or dine in the white tableclothed dining room. Evenings get rammed.

Beach Blanket Babylon (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 2907; 45 Ledbury Rd W11; mains £14.50-25.50; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) BBB, with its French-chateau-meets-Gaudí décor of extravagant chandeliers, distressed bar, statues, brick walls, red velvet and gilt chairs, and gargoyle fireplace, has been around for a while but is still fabulous. Request a table in the chapel for a memorable dining experience.

Fitzrovia & Clerkenwell

Fitzrovia is a hidden gem for restaurants, while Clerkenwell has a happening dining scene.

BUDGET

Greenery (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7490 4870; 5 Cowcross St EC1; light meals from £1.50; ⊖ Farringdon) A salt-of-the-earth veggie café, offering such tantalizing juice cocktails as Beetroot Blast (carrot, beetroot, apple and ginger). There's always a lunchtime queue of workers needing their superfoods.

Planet Organic (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7436 1929; 22 Torrington Pl WC1; hot food & salads from £2.25; ⊖ Goodge St) As the name suggests, everything in this café-supermarket is organic. Fresh veggies are sourced (where possible) directly from British farms. For healthy beauty ingest the skin tonic superjuice of wheatgrass, apple, celery, mixed greens and aloe vera or buy skin-care of the slap-it-on variety.

ICCo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7580 9688; 46 Goodge St W1; pizzas from £3; ⊖ Goodge St) The Italian Coffee Company does a great turn in cheap and tasty pizzas. It also offers a free croissant with every hot drink before midday, which makes good breakfast sense. It's the building on the corner decked out in the colours of the Italian flag.

Little Bay (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 1234; 171 Farringdon Rd EC1; mains £6-8 ⊖ Farringdon) The crushed-velvet ceiling, handmade twisted lamps that improve around the room (as the artist got better) and elaborately painted bar and tables showing nymphs frolicking is bonkers but fun. The tasty food is good value.

Al's Bar & Cafe (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7837 4821; 11-13 Exmouth Market EC1; mains £6-8; ⊖ Farringdon) Al's is a bit like a pair of novelty slippers but without the embarrassment – cheerful, comfortable and perfect for resting your feet. The café's red awnings are as chirpy as the staff and the food (try the goat's cheese bruschetta). Outdoor tables get busy in summer, especially during happy hour (4pm to 7pm).

St John (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7251 0848; 26 St John St EC1; mains £12.80-21.50; ⊖ Farringdon) Bright whitewashed brick walls, high ceilings and simple wooden furniture keep diners free to concentrate on ye olde English staples such as offal, ox tongue and devilled kidneys. The bar menu includes oysters and Welsh rarebit (if the kidneys didn't do it for you).

MIDRANGE

dim t (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 1122; 32 Charlotte St W1; dim sum from £2.50, noodle bar £7.65; ⊖ Goodge St) Follow the pink neon sign to this lip-smacking dim-sum and noodle restaurant. Choose your meat, fish or tofu, then your noodle type, and top it off with a sauce: spicy, Thai, Hong Kong, etc. If you're a low-carb customer, the Vietnamese duck and pomegranate salad is scrummy (and packed with antioxidants). And the dim sum is great too (yes, we really like it here).

Salt Yard (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7637 0657; 54 Goodge St W1; tapas £2.75-8.50; ⊖ Goodge St) Named after the place where cold meats are cured, this buzzing local joint serves delicious Spanish and Italian tapas. The smart navy awning, low lighting, terracotta walls and intimate tables surrounded by happy eaters draw you in. Try the tiger prawns chargrilled with rosemary and chilli or flex your palate with fennel and parmesan gratin.

Eagle Bar Diner (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 1418; 3-5 Rathbone Pl W1; mains £4-13; 🕒 open till 1am Sat; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) The burgers here are sensational and with 15 speciality types as well as the classic (with a selection of cheeses of course), you're spoilt for choice. Cosy down in the leather booths, enjoy the DJ's funky electro jazz or house, and sip a peanut butter martini (the signature cocktail).

Smiths of Smithfield (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7251 7950; 67-77 Charterhouse St EC1; mains £5-18; ⊖ Farringdon) This converted meat-packing warehouse is one of our favourite spots out east. Hit the ground-floor café for brunch, follow the silver-clad pipe-work upstairs to find a sexy champagne and cocktail bar, or climb again for a brasserie and smarter dining room.

Rasa Samudra (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 0222; 5 Charlotte St W1; mains £6.25-13; ⊖ Goodge St) The hot-pink exterior of this restaurant specialising in seafood and vegetarian cuisine from Kerala sets an upbeat tone that continues inside. The goddess Parvati greets you, gold elephant furniture hangs on the walls, a purple sari adorns the ceiling and a lit lamp nods to the gods. Try the Kerala seafood feast for £30.

Bleeding Heart Restaurant & Bistro (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7242 8238; Bleeding Heart Yard; bistro mains £7.45-14.95, restaurant mains £11.95-21.50; ⊖ Farringdon) Locals have taken this place tucked in the corner of Bleeding Heart Yard to their hearts. Choose from formal dining in the downstairs restaurant or more relaxed meals in the buzzy bistro – wherever, the French food is divine.

Easton (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 7608; 22 Easton St WC1; mains £9-13; 🕒 until 1am Fri & Sat; ⊖ Farringdon) This comfortable, spacious gastropub serves up reliably good grub. There's a DJ on Friday nights when tapas replace the full menu. Staff get a bit twitchy with noisy leavers – and don't ever dance on the outside tables (they come from Bali apparently).

Medcalf (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 3533; 40 Exmouth Market EC1; mains £10.50-16.50; ⊖ Farringdon) The façade tells you this used to be a butcher's but the meat hooks now sport large light bulbs and the walls are festooned with changing art exhibitions rather than beef. The meat market's loss is our gain – come here for delicious British fare, good wine and a chilled-out vibe.

Dans le Noir (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7253 1100; 30-31 Clerkenwell Green EC1; surprise meal 2/3 courses £29/37; ⊖ Farringdon) If you've often felt in the dark about food, eating in the pitch black might suit you. A waiter guides you to your table, plate and cutlery. Then it's up to you to guess what you're eating and enjoy the anonymous conviviality of the dark…

TOP END

Hakkasan (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7907 1888; 8 Hanway Pl W1; mains £7.50-38; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Hidden down a lane like all fashionable haunts need to be, the first Chinese restaurant to get a Michelin star combines celebrity status, a stunning design, persuasive cocktails and surprisingly sophisticated Chinese food. If you're feeling flash why not order the whole duck, 30g Royal Beluga caviar and baby cucumber (24 hours notice required) for a tidy £140.

Camden & Islington

There are plenty of decent places to eat on and around Camden High St and Upper St in Islington.

BUDGET

Le Mercury (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7354 4088; 140A Upper St N1; mains £6, specials £7-12; ⊖ Highbury or Islington) A cosy Gaelic haunt ideal for a romantic tête-à-tête. Sunday lunch by the open fire upstairs is a treat although you'll have to book.

Tupelo Honey (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7284 2989; 27 Parkway NW1; mains £8; ⊖ Camden Town) Toasted sandwiches, hot meals and salad are on offer in this sweet-like-honey café with old wooden furniture, squishy sofas upstairs and an inviting roof terrace.

MIDRANGE

Lansdowne (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7483 0409; 90 Gloucester Ave NW1; mains £5-16; ⊖ Chalk Farm) Very popular with locals (both celeb and nonceleb), this relaxed gastropub serves mean pizzas and a selection of tasty pub grub.

Duke of Cambridge (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 3066; 30 St Peter's St N1; mains £5-16; ⊖ Chalk Farm) Tucked away from busy Upper St, this organic gastropub is a feast of tasty but overpriced rustic British cuisine, real ale and gentrified boozing.

Konstam at the Prince Albert (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 5040; 2 Acton St WC1; mains £10.50-15.50; ⊖ King's Cross) How's this for a kooky idea? Chef Oliver Rowe sources all his ingredients from within the London tube map. He has to cheat on a few (tea, coffee, spices) but not enough to stop the BBC2 crowning him 'The Urban Chef' in a TV series that attracted viewers even during the football World Cup (which in England is really saying something). Book a table below the draping metallic ceiling and watch your dish take shape in the open kitchen.

Elk in the Woods (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7226 3535; 39 Camden Passage N1; mains £11-15; ⊖ Angel) This intriguing restaurant with brick tiles, a metal bar, eclectic mirrors and a stuffed elk's head dishes up lip-smacking stews, game and other warming plates.

Engineer (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7722 0950; 65 Gloucester Ave NW1; mains £11.75-16.75; ⊖ Chalk Farm) One of London's original gastropubs serving up consistently good international cuisine to hip north Londoners. There's a good selection of wines and beers, and a splendid garden.

TOP END

Frederick's (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 3902; Camden Passage N1; mains £11.50-19.50; ⊖ Angel) Civilised and sophisticated with excellent European food, Frederick's has fine dining in the conservatory and a comprehensive drinks list in the bar, which spills outside in summer. Pretheatre and lunch menus are available.

Outside Central London

If you're visiting the sights in Hampstead or Kew, consider a meal at the following restaurants and save yourself having to bolt back to the centre of town.

HAMPSTEAD

Jin Kichi (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7794 6158; 73 Heath St NW3; mains £4.30-12.80; ⊖ Hampstead) One of the best Japanese restaurants in north London. It's small and slightly shabby but so popular with London's Japanese that you won't be able to enjoy its grilled meats and other Asian flavours unless you book.

KEW

Glasshouse (☎ 8940 6777; 14 Station Parade W9; set lunch/dinner £23.50/35; ⊖ Kew Gardens) Virtually next to the tube station, it specialises in modern British cuisine and is a pleasant way to round off a visit to the gardens. The menus are set but the choice is large.

DRINKING

The pub is the social focus of London life and savouring pub life is a pleasure of any visit. From ancient atmospheric taverns to slick DJ bars, London has a lot to offer the discerning tippler no matter how hard the themed and chain bars try to take over.

West End – Soho to the Strand

W Sens (Map pp130-1; 12 Waterloo Pl SW1; 🕒 11am-1am Mon-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; ⊖ Piccadilly) London outpost of French Compagnie des Comptoirs bar/restaurant group, W Sens has a chilled, sophisticated vibe. The amber-lit bar hugged by chocolate snakeskin stools, matching silver-backed Louis XIV chairs, huge suspended spherical lamp and silver curtains was designed by Philippe Starck pupil Imad Ramouni. The brother of Jean-Marc Challe (of Buddha Bar fame) DJs periodically; on other nights you'll hear similar Asian loungey sounds.

Absolut Ice Bar (Map pp130-1; 31-33 Heddon St W1; 🕒 12.30pm-midnight; entry Thu, Fri & Sat evenings £15, lunchtimes & other evenings £12; ⊖ Piccadilly) At -6°C this is literally the coolest bar in London. Entry is limited to 40 minutes in this bar made entirely of ice, and your ticket includes a vodka cocktail served in ice glasses imported from Sweden. The compulsory futuristic silver polyester cape is to protect the bar from your body heat not the other way around so wear warm togs. It's a gimmick, but it makes a fun change from the norm and is perfect if you need to chill (sorry).

Queen Mary (Map pp130-1; Waterloo Pier WC2; ⊖ Temple) Ignore the rather tacky signage outside and climb aboard this steamer for a welcoming publike bar with great views of the London Eye and the South Bank. In summer there's a fish shop on deck. On Fridays and Saturdays the Hornblowers Nightclub pumps with house and dance music.

Gordon's Wine Bar (Map pp130-1; 47 Villiers St WC2; ⊖ Charing Cross) What's not to love about this cavernous wine cellar lit by candles and practically unchanged over the last 100 years? Choose between wines, sherries, ports and Madeiras accompanied by warming home-cooked grub. Duck your head to settle in.

Coach & Horses (Map pp130-1; 29 Greek St W1; ⊖ Leicester Sq) This Soho institution was made famous by writer and newspaper columnist Jeffrey Bernard who, more or less, drank himself to death here. It was also patronised by Sigmund Freud, Francis Bacon, Dylan Thomas, Peter Cooke and Peter O'Toole. At the time of writing the new owner was planning a 50-cover restaurant upstairs serving traditional English pies.

Heights (Map pp122-3; 15th fl, St George's Hotel, Langham Pl W1; ⊖ Oxford St) Take the lift up to this understated bar with leather seats, contemporary lighting and huge windows: spot the BT Tower, the Gherkin (Swiss Re building), Canary Wharf and Battersea Power Station while you tuck into tapas and sip your cocktail.

Lamb & Flag (Map pp130-1; 33 Rose St WC2; ⊖ Covent Garden) A popular historic pub and everyone's Covent Garden 'find' so it's often jammed. It was built in 1623 and was formerly called the 'Bucket of Blood'.

Westminster & Pimlico

Red Lion (Map pp122-3; 48 Parliament St SW1; ⊖ Westminster) This classic, late-19th-century pub with polished mahogany, etched glassware, dark-red curtains and carved ceiling has a cosy feel. Keep your eyes peeled for MPs popping out for a pint.

Westminster Arms (Map pp122-3; 9 Storey's Gate SW1; ⊖ Westminster) It's mainly standing room only on the ground floor of this pleasant pub but head downstairs to the wine bar and you can just imagine the politicians plotting in the discreet booths.

Bloomsbury, Fitzrovia, Holborn & Clerkenwell

Café Kick (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7739 8700; 43 Exmouth Market EC1; 🕑 till midnight Fri & Sat; ⊖ Farringdon) This former French bar has been happily overtaken by Latin flags, football scarves, Mediterranean food and mojitos. With an unusually high table-football-to-floor-space ratio, drinkers often spill out onto Exmouth Market. During happy hour (4pm to 7pm) cocktails are a tidy £4.

Cock Tavern (Map pp122-3; East Poultry Ave EC1; ⊖ Farringdon) This pub is legendary, despite its rather bland interior, for serving booze with breakfast from 6.30am; it's understandably popular with the workers from Smithfield Market who've done a day's work while most of us are still getting our beauty sleep.

Deux Beers (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7405 9777; 3 Hatton Wall EC1; 🕑 till midnight Fri & Sat; ⊖ Farringdon) Within twinkling distance of the diamond district (hence the name), this smallish bar has a wall-bound wheel of shots – a sort of tequila roulette. Too many of these and you'll be dancing on the bar (mind your head on the groovy tentacular chandeliers).

Jerusalem Tavern (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7490 4281; 55 Britton St EC1; ⊖ Farringdon) Pick a wood-panelled cubbyhole at this gorgeous former 18th-century coffee-shop-turned-inn, and choose from a selection of St Peter's beers such as cinnamon and apple, lemon and ginger, or good old-fashioned ale (if you're not feeling fruity).

Jerusalem (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7255 1120; 33/34 Rathbone Pl; 🕑 till 1am Thu, Fri & Sat, till midnight Tue & Wed; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) This uncomplicated bar-restaurant has been drawing a media crowd for a decade and is still going strong. The chunky wooden tables shift for dancers moving to the DJ's pop, chart and house on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Princess Louise (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7405 8816; 208 High Holborn WC1; ⊖ Holborn) This late-19th-century Victorian boozer was voted London's most beautiful pub by *London Tonight* news programme and we have to agree – it's an absolute stunner. Spectacularly decorated with a riot of fine tiles, etched mirrors, plasterwork and a gorgeous central horseshoe bar, the pub gets packed with the after-work crowd so get there early if you want a seat.

Museum Tavern (Map pp130-1; 49 Great Russell St WC1; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Where Karl Marx used to retire to for a sup after a hard day in the British Museum Reading Room. If it was good enough for him…

Hoxton, Shoreditch & the City

Bar Music Hall (Map p125; ☎ 7613 5951; 134 Curtain Rd EC2; 🕑 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-2am Fri & Sat, 11am-midnight Sun; ⊖ Old St) Keeping the old East End music-hall tradition alive but with a modern twist, this roomy space with central bar and bags of squishy seats amuses the friendly punters with DJs and live bands. Music runs the gamut from punk to jazz to rock and roll and disco.

Cantaloupe (Map p125; 35-43 Charlotte Rd EC2; 🕑 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun; ⊖ Old St) This founding member of the Shoreditch warehouse conversion scene may not be as achingly trendy as the newer kids on the block but it's still a favourite.

Grapeshots (Map p125; 2/3 Artillery Passage E1; ⊖ Liverpool St) Half the fun of this wine bar is walking down the Dickensian passage, complete with old street-lamps, that leads to it. Once inside, it's the perfect spot for a glass of old-fashioned chilled vino.

Ten Bells (Map p125; cnr Commercial & Fournier Sts E1; ⊖ Liverpool St) The most famous Jack the Ripper pub, patronised by his victims before their grisly ends, and possibly the slayer himself. Admire the wonderful 18th-century tiles and ponder the past over a pint.

Loungelover (Map p125; ☎ 7012 1234; 1 Whitby St E1; 🕑 6pm-midnight Tue-Thu, 6pm-1am Fri, 4-10.30pm Sun; ⊖ Liverpool St) Book a table, check your coat and bag in at the door and feel like a movie star. This eclectically decorated lounge, loosely divided into different areas – red, the cage, baroque and the front – could almost be a film set, or the shoot of a supercool interiors magazine. Sip a cocktail and admire the Louis XIV chairs, the oversized wine glasses acting as vases, the huge hippo head, the cage-turned-living room, the neon twirling stools and the loopy chandeliers. Utterly fabulous.

T Bar (Map p125; ☎ 7729 2973; 56 Shoreditch High St E1; 🕑 9am-midnight Tue & Wed, 9am-1am Thu, 9am-2am Fri, 8pm-2am Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; ⊖ Liverpool St) This student-union-style cavernous bar is very 'now'. DJs spin a range of sounds from hard house to old rock like Johnny Cash. An illuminated clock outside counts down the seconds to last orders so there's no excuse for wasting any (seconds or orders).

Drunken Monkey (Map p125; 222 Shoreditch High St E1; 🕑 noon-midnight; ⊖ Liverpool St) This hip bar-cum-dim sum house is a nice surprise. Orange Chinese lanterns cast a warm glow over the red walls to a soundtrack of electro-funk and jazz, the bar has a friendly, buzzing vibe, and the food is tasty (particularly the crab and pork dumplings). During happy hour (5pm to 7pm weekdays, 6pm to 7.30pm on Saturday) cocktails slip down for £4.50 each.

TOP FIVE PLACES TO DRINK IN THE SUN

- Café Kick (opposite)
- Flask (p171)
- George Inn (below)
- Queen Mary (opposite)
- Windsor Castle (p170)

Old Blue Last (Map p125; ☎ 7739 7033; 39 Great Eastern St EC2; 🕑 noon-midnight Mon-Wed, noon-1am Thu & Sun, noon-2am Fri & Sat; ⊖ Old St) A bright-pink neon sign saying VICE declares this grungy pub's owners (*Vice* magazine) and the crowd hugging the horseshoe bar certainly get down to the rockin' tunes from DJs or the jukebox.

Sosho (Map p125; ☎ 7920 0701; 2 Tabernacle St EC2; 🕑 noon-10pm Mon, noon-midnight Tue, noon-1am Wed & Thu, noon-3am Fri, 7pm-4am Sat, 9pm-4am Sun; ⊖ Moorgate) Sexy, glamorous and off limits if you're not feeling either of the above, although the cocktails could soon get you in the mood.

Jamaica Wine House (Map p125; 12 St Michael's Alley EC3; ⊖ Bank) London's first coffee house is now a Victorian pub attractively divided into wood-panelled areas and popular with City-boys who work nearby.

Vertigo 42 (Map p125; Tower 42, Old Broad St EC2; ⊖ Liverpool St) Book a two-hour slot at a table in this bar with expansive views that stretch across all of London. The views bounce off the mirrors as well as through the windows making it a truly vertiginous experience.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Map pp122-3; Wine Office Ct EC4; ⊖ Blackfriars) Rebuilt six years after the Great Fire, this place was popular with Dr Johnson, Thackeray, Dickens and the visiting Mark Twain. Touristy but always atmospheric and enjoyable for a pub meal.

Borough, Southwark & Bermondsey

Anchor (Map p125; 34 Park St SE1; ⊖ London Bridge) An 18th-century boozer just east of the Globe Theatre, it has a terrace offering superb views over the Thames. Dr Johnson is said to have written some of his dictionary here.

George Inn (Map p125; Talbot Yard, 77 Borough High St SE1; ⊖ London Bridge or Borough) Tucked away in a cobbled courtyard near Borough Market is London's last surviving galleried coaching inn, dating from 1677 and now belonging to the National Trust. Charles Dickens and Shakespeare used to prop up the bar here (but not together, obviously). There are great outdoor tables for sunny days.

Garrison Public House (Map pp116-17; 99-101 Bermondsey St SE1; ⊖ London Bridge) Stepping into this French country-kitchen-style pub is like slipping on a cashmere sweater – you feel comforted and more attractive immediately. Choose between modern grey flannel seats, secluded booths and high window tables perching beneath the dried flowers and watched over by a stag's head. Settle in for breakfast (try French toast with banana, bacon and maple syrup), a gastro-meal or just a warming drink.

Village East (Map pp116-17; 171 Bermondsey St; 🕓 noon-1.30am Thu, Fri & Sat, to 10.30pm Sun, to midnight Mon-Wed; ⊖ London Bridge) Sitting with one half in a modern glass apartment block and the other in a converted, listed cloth factory doesn't seem to have given this bar schizophrenia. In fact the exposed brick goes very well with soft bespoke lights, dark wood, metal bar stools and retro furniture. There's a lounge bar, a cocktail bar and two dining rooms, one with visible kitchen.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

Grenadier (Map pp122-3; 18 Wilton Row SW1; ⊖ Hyde Park Corner) In summer, drinkers pile down the steps of this tiny pub, settling in the sentry box or standing outside. It's not easy to find, nestling down a pretty mews, but the welcoming, panelled interior is worth the journey.

King's Head & Eight Bells (Map pp126-7; 50 Cheyne Walk SW3; ⊖ Sloane Sq) An attractive corner pub pleasantly hung with flower baskets in summer. It was a favourite of the painter Whistler and the writer Carlyle.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Marylebone

Trailer Happiness (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 2700; 177 Portobello Rd W11; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) Think shag-pile carpets, '60s California kitsch and trashy trailer-park glamour. Try the genuine Tiki cocktails and share a flaming volcano bowl of Zombie with a friend to ensure your evening goes with a bang. If you get peckish there are reasonably priced snack platters like Dr Jay's Green Chilli Fireballs and Trailer Happiness Smokin' Sausage salsa. With a soundtrack that's as loungey as the ambience, a night at Trailer H is truly groovy.

Cow (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7221 5400; 89 Westbourne Park Rd W2; ⊖ Westbourne Park or Royal Oak) A superb gastropub with outstanding food and a jovial pub-is-a-pub atmosphere. Seafood is a speciality and the staff are much friendlier than you'd expect from somewhere so perpetually hip.

Churchill Arms (Map pp120-1; 119 Kensington Church St W8; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) A lovely, traditional tavern with tankards and casks dangling from the ceiling, Winston memorabilia and bric-a-brac. There's an excellent Thai restaurant (mains £6) in the pleasant conservatory out the back.

Windsor Castle (Map pp120-1; 114 Campden Hill Rd W11; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) A memorable pub with oak partitions separating the original bars. The panels have tiny doors so big drinkers will have trouble getting past the front bar. It also has one of the loveliest walled gardens (with heaters in winter) of any pub in London.

Camden & Islington

Keston Lodge (Map pp118-19; 131 Upper St N1; ⊖ Angel) A chilled-out, trendy-leather-sofa and distressed-wood type place with DJs on Friday and Saturday, good pies and table service.

Crown & Goose (Map pp118-19; 100 Arlington Rd NW1; ⊖ Camden Town) One of our favourite London pubs. The square room has a central wooden bar between British racing green walls studded with gilt-framed mirrors and illuminated by big shuttered windows. More importantly, it combines a good-looking crowd, good beer, easy conviviality and top tucker.

Bar Vinyl (Map pp118-19; 6 Inverness St NW1; ⊖ Camden Town) With loud music and groovy clientele, it's an earful of the Camden scene. There's a record shop in the basement.

Medicine Bar (Map pp118-19; 181 Upper St N1; ⊖ Highbury or Islington) Coolly unpretentious, it plays good music from funk to disco and stays open until 2am at the weekend. It also has a sister bar in Shoreditch.

Pembroke Castle (Map pp118-19; 150 Gloucester Ave NW1; ⊖ Chalk Farm) A light, airy retro place with beer garden, where you can feel just as comfortable supping wine as ale.

Outside Central London

GREENWICH

Trafalgar Tavern (Map p132; Park Row SE10; DLR Cutty Sark) A Regency-style pub that was built in 1837 and stands above the site of the old Placentia Palace where Henry VIII was born. It's the former drinking den of Dickens, Gladstone and Disraeli.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

Hollybush (22 Holly Mount NW3; ⊖ Hampstead) A beautiful pub that makes you envy the privileged residents of Hampstead. It has an antique Victorian interior, a lovely secluded hill-top location, open fires in winter and a knack for making you stay longer than you had intended any time of the year. It's above Heath St, reached via Holly Bush Steps.

Flask (77 Highgate West Hill N6; ⊖ Highgate) Charming candlelit nooks and crannies, an old circular bar complete with pumps (don't knock yourself when you sit down) and a lovely beer garden make this the perfect place for a pint after visiting Highgate Cemetery (p149). If the bar queues are awful head into Highgate village for other pleasant pubs.

Spaniard's Inn (Spaniard's Rd NW3; ⊖ Hampstead, then bus 21) A marvellous tavern that dates from 1585. Dick Turpin, the dandy highwayman, was born here and used it as a hang-out in his later years, while more savoury sorts like Dickens, Shelley, Keats and Byron also availed themselves of its charms. There's a big, blissful garden and good food.

ENTERTAINMENT

You've done the sights and supped and drank your fill – you're ready to take on London's thriving entertainment scene. From cutting-edge clubs and international bands to Hollywood stars doing theatre turns – you'd need a lifetime to exhaust the opportunities for fun. This list only scratches the surface; make sure to check the listings (see p133) for what's going on.

Theatre

London is a world capital for theatre and there's a lot more than mammoth musicals to tempt you into the West End. The term 'West End' – as with Broadway – generally refers to the big-money productions like musicals, but also includes such heavyweights as the **Royal Court** (Map p128; ☎ 7565 5000; Sloane Sq SW1; ⊖ Sloane Sq), the patron of new British writing; the **Royal National Theatre** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7452 3000; South Bank SE1; ⊖ Waterloo), which has three auditoriums and showcases classics and new plays from some of the world's best companies; and the **Royal Shakespeare Company** (RSC; ☎ 0870 609 1110), with productions of the Bard's classics and stuff he might have been interested in.

On performance days you can buy half-price tickets for West End productions (cash only) from the **Leicester Square Half-Price Ticket Booth** (Map pp130-1; Leicester Sq; 🕓 noon-6.30pm; ⊖ Leicester Sq), on the south side of Leicester Sq. The booth is the one with the clock tower – beware of touts selling dodgy tickets.

Off West End – where you'll generally find the most original works – includes venues such as the **Almeida** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 4404; www.almeida.co.uk; Almeida St N1; ⊖ Highbury & Islington), **Battersea Arts Centre** (Map pp116-17; Lavender Hill SW1; ⊖ Chapham Junction) and the **Young Vic** (Map pp122-3; 66 The Cut, Waterloo Rd SE1; ⊖ Waterloo). The next rung down is known as the fringe and these shows take place anywhere there's a stage (and can be very good).

For a comprehensive look at what's being staged where, consult *Time Out* or visit www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk.

Nightclubs

If you like clubbing, you've come to the right place. From cabaret to superclub, the city has a mind-boggling number of venues pumping music from disco, to R&B, garage or house. Some clubs have several different rooms, while others change the tempo according to the night. Admission prices vary from £3 to £10 Sunday to Thursday, but on Friday and Saturday can be as much as £20.

Astoria (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 9592; www.g-a-y.co.uk; 157-165 Charing Cross Rd WC2 ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) This dark, sweaty and atmospheric club has the famous G-A-Y night Saturday with live shows

GAY & LESBIAN LONDON

London has a fabulous gay scene. It is rare to encounter any problems with couples sharing rooms or holding hands on the street. In the gay venues listed – see Astoria (above), Heaven (p172), Too2Much (p172), the Ghetto (p172), Madame Jo Jo's (p172), Gay's the Word (p115) and the Philbeach Hotel (p158) – you should find the political *Pink Paper* (free) or, for listings, *Gay Times* (£3.25), *Boyz* (free) or the lesbian *Diva* (£3.15). The gay sections of *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard's Metro Life* are useful, as is www.rainbownetwork.com for men and www.gingerbeer.co.uk for women.

from stars like Madonna and Shayne Ward, a cheap Pink Pounder Monday, a disco-oriented Camp Attack Friday and other attractions such as Porn Idol, an amateur strip night. Popular with young out-of-towners.

Guanabara (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7242 8600; cnr Parker St & Drury Lane W1; admission £5-8; ⊖ Covent Garden) Brazil comes to London in this hot club with live music seven nights a week. On Wednesdays enjoy an authentic Roda de Samba played by the sons of the founding fathers of samba. Tuck into Brazilian snacks and Caipirinha and shake your booty. Admission is free before 8.30pm.

Herbal (Map p125; ☎ 7613 4462; 14 Kingsland Rd E2; 🕒 9pm-2am Tue-Thu & Sun, 9pm-3am Fri & Sat; admission £3-10, free Tue-Thu; ⊖ Old St) With two dance floors and a smashing roof terrace, it's no wonder Herbal remains popular. Music weaves through drum 'n' bass, disco, hip-hop, break beats, garage and house.

Fabric (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7336 8898; 77A Charterhouse St EC1; admission £10-15; ⊖ Farringdon) Voted the world's best club by 600 international DJs in *DJ* magazine (March 2006), Fabric, with its three dance floors set in a converted meat cold-store is riding high. Fridays offer drum 'n' bass, break beats, hip-hop and live bands, Saturdays see house, techno and electro while Sunday holds gay night DTPM.

Ghetto (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 3726; 5-6 Falconberg Ct W1; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Home to the celebrity-attended, mixed-evening Nag, Nag, Nag on Wednesday, and Friday's electro/pop the Cock, among others, this is London's friendliest, least pretentious gay club, with cheap drinks and alternative music. It's small and can get a bit sweaty, but that's just all the more reason to take your shirt off, right?

Bar Rumba (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 2715; 36 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) Along a Soho backstreet, it's a small club with a big reputation. There's a different style each night – from Latin and jazz to deep house and garage – but everyone's a winner.

CROW'S NEST COCKTAILS

There's nothing like surveying the city with a drink in hand. Take the lift to some of these beauties:

5th View (see Waterstone's, p115)
Heights (p168)
Oxo Tower (p163)
Vertigo 42 (p169)
Windows Restaurant & Bar (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7493 8000; Hilton, 22 Park Lane W1; ⊖ Hyde Park Corner)

Cargo (Map p125; ☎ 7739 3440; 83 Rivington St EC2; admission £5-10; ⊖ Old St) A hugely popular club with local and international DJs and a courtyard where you can simultaneously enjoy big sounds and the great outdoors. The music policy is particularly innovative, but you can usually rely on Latin house, nu-jazz and rare grooves.

Cross (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7837 0828; Goods Way Depot, York Way N1; ⊖ King's Cross St Pancras) A little out of the way, in the King's Cross wastelands, but it's one of London's leading clubs serving up a Continental-style beat to a convivial crowd.

Turnmills (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7250 3409; 63b Clerkenwell Rd EC1; admission £12-15; ⊖ Farringdon) House-music fans should head to this industrial-style club with wacky silver, red and yellow inflatable stars and myriad mirror balls. Fridays is progressive house and trance, Saturdays is funky house and the Sunday after-party offers more house, this time of the electro variety.

Heaven (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7930 2022; The Arches, Villiers St WC2; admission £5-15; ⊖ Charing Cross) One of the world's best-known gay clubs. It has three rooms; some nights are mixed but it positively fizzes with party boys on Saturday night, while there are cheap drinks and no pretension at Monday's Popcorn.

Madame Jo Jo's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 3040; 8 Brewer St W1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) A renowned transvestite cabaret, which is sleazy, fun and kitsch. It gives way to a deep house/nu-jazz club night on Saturday and a 'Deep Funk' night on Friday.

Ministry of Sound (Map pp116-17; www.ministryofsound.co.uk; 103 Gaunt St SE1; admission £12-15; 🕒 until 8am; ⊖ Elephant & Castle) Where the global brand started. It lost a little of its edge over time, but sharpened up with a major refurbishment in late 2003. It's London's most famous club and still packs in a diverse crew with big local and international names.

Notting Hill Arts Club (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7460 4459; 21 Notting Hill Gate W11; admission £5-8; 🕒 until 2am, 1am Sun; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate) A laid-back, funky basement club that attracts an eclectic crowd and has art exhibitions plus music ranging from global to hip-hop and jazz.

Too2Much (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 0377; Walker's Ct W1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) Elton John and David Furnish held their stag party here, and the club with piano bar on one side, cabaret stage on the other (linked by a bridge over the alley) is a rampant riot of crushed velvet and retro styling. Popular with the gay fash-pack.

NOVEL NIGHTS OUT

It seems some people have had enough of going clubbing, listening to a band or propping up a bar with a pint. To plant your finger on the party pulse, check out some of these activity-based night-haunts.

Bloomsbury Bowling Lanes (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7691 2652; cnr Bedford Way & Tavistock Sq WC1; 🕒 noon-2am Mon-Wed, to 3am Thu-Sat, to midnight Sun; ⊖ Russell Sq) With eight 10-pin bowling lanes, a complete diner and details down to the carpet all dating from the 1950s and shipped in from America, this place is the real deal. And the fun doesn't stop with dubious footwear and a burger, there's also two private karaoke rooms, a cinema screening independent movies, DJs playing tunes from '50s rock to '60s anthems and the latest numbers, plus up-and-coming live bands. With beer a snip at £3, this car park-turned-retro fun-park equals a top night out. And you could be in celebrity company – if the curtain's drawn around lane number 8 Kevin Spacey might be playing…

Lucky Voice (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 3660; 52 Poland St W1; booth per person per hr £5-10; 🕒 5.30pm-1am Mon-Fri, 3pm-1am Sat; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Moulded on the private karaoke bars of Tokyo, super-stylish Lucky Voice is a low-lit maze of dark walls with hidden doors revealing snug leather-clad soundproofed booths for your secret sing-along. Select one of 50,000 songs from a touch screen to display the lyrics on a 32cm, pick up a microphone and choose your voice function: reverb, rapper, stadium feel, etc. In the Super Lucky rooms you've got wigs and blow-up guitars to enhance your performance. Drinks and bento boxes are ordered by the touch of a button and if you need Dutch courage to warm up, sip a delicious Lucky Destiny cocktail in the bar.

Roller Disco (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7630 6625; www.rollerdisco.info; Canvas – Bagley's Studios, King's Cross Freight Depot, York Way N1; admission incl skate hire £10; 🕒 8pm-midnight Thu, to 2am Fri; ⊖ King's Cross) Remember those adolescent roller discos you used to go to? Well, this is your chance to dust off your skating skills and roll around the three arenas to a changing soundtrack of disco, funk, House, garage and R&B. To get really into the spirit dress up in '70s or '80s gear. If you're lucky maybe you'll make out with that guy/babe you've been eyeing up for ages (oh sorry we're not actually back at school, are we?) This is a popular night, so book in advance.

333 (Map p125; ☎ 7739 5949; 333 Old St EC1; 🕒 10pm-5am Fri & Sat, to 4am Sun; ⊖ Old St) A Hoxton old-timer with three shambling levels of electro, indie, rock and live acts.

Live Music

ROCK & JAZZ

London's live-music scene is fantastic, and any night of the week you can catch bands and performances that would be the envy of any gig-goer around the world.

Barfly@the Monarch (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 907 0999; www.barflyclub.com; Monarch Pub, 49 Chalk Farm Rd NW1; ⊖ Chalk Farm) Pleasantly grungy, and the place to see the best upcoming bands.

Borderline (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 5547; www.borderline.co.uk; Orange Yard W1; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) A small, relaxed venue, hosting bands on the verge of the mainstream. It's also your best bet to see big-name acts performing under pseudonyms.

Brixton Academy (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7771 3000; www.brixton-academy.co.uk; 211 Stockwell Rd SW9; ⊖ Brixton) This Grade-II listed Art Deco venue is always winning awards for 'best live venue' and has hosted top names like the Clash, Madonna and Bob Dylan.

Forum (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 154 40 40; 9-17 Highgate Rd NW5; ⊖ Kentish Town) A grand old theatre and one of London's best large venues.

Hackney Ocean (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8986 5336; 270 Mare St E8; ⊖ Bethnal Green) Has sensational acoustics and hosts the usual headliners, but adds a strong line in world music, reflecting the multiculturalism of Hackney.

Jazz Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7534 6955; 5 Parkway NW1; ⊖ Camden Town) A rather swanky restaurant venue. While you don't have to eat, it's better to book a table for the big names.

Ronnie Scott's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 0747; 47 Frith St W1; ⊖ Leicester Sq) Familiar to aficionados as the best jazz club in London. The food, atmosphere and acts are always spot-on.

Shepherd's Bush Empire (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8354 3300; www.shepherds-bush-empire.co.uk; Shepherd's Bush Green W12; ⊖ Shepherd's Bush) A slightly dishevelled,

BURLESQUE IS BACK

Basques, suspenders, cinched waists, circle skirts, tweed, top hats, trilbies, spats, feathers, foxtrot, lindy hop, divas, mime artists and of course cabaret – burlesque's retro sexy sophistication sizzles. Revived by Immodesty Blaize in Blighty and Dita von Teese stateside, there's no hotter trend for night owls. Here are the most decadently divine nights: don't forget to dress up and adopt an air of languid panache.

Baroness Ball (www.baronessaball.com)
Flash Monkey (www.theflashmonkey.biz)
Immodesty Blaize (www.immodestyblaize.com)
Jack and Ginger (www.myspace.com/jack_and_ginger)
Jitterbugs (www.jitterbugs.co.uk/home.asp)
Lady Luck (www.ladyluckclub.co.uk)
Modern Times Club (www.themoderntimesclub.co.uk/)
Viva Cake (www.myspace.com/vivacakebitches)
Volupté (www.volupte-lounge.com/inside.php)
Whoopee (www.thewhoopeeclub.com)

midsize theatre that hosts some terrific bands watched by laid-back punters.

100 Club (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7636 0933; 100 Oxford St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) This legendary London venue once showcased the Stones and was at the centre of the punk revolution. It now divides its time between jazz, rock and even a little swing.

CLASSICAL

With four world-class symphony orchestras, two opera companies, various smaller ensembles, brilliant venues, reasonable prices and high standards of performance, London is a classical capital.

South Bank Centre (☎ 08703 800 400; South Bank SE1; ⊖ Embankment) Home to the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra, this centre has three premier venues in the Royal Festival Hall (Map pp122–3; under refurbishment until 2007) and the smaller Queen Elizabeth Hall (Map pp122–3) and Purcell Room (Map pp122–3), which host classical, opera, jazz and choral music. As part of an improvement plan to bring the centre into the 21st century, it has recently added an attractive riverside people-watching mecca of glassed-in shops and restaurants. Check out the free recitals in the foyer.

Barbican Centre (Map p125; ☎ 0845 120 7500; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; ♿; ⊖ Barbican) At the time of writing, the centre was undergoing a much-needed refurbishment to make the rather ugly entrances more attractive. The hulking complex has a full programme of film, music, theatre, art and dance, including loads of concerts from the London Symphony Orchestra, which is based here.

Royal Albert Hall (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7589 8212; www.royalalberthall.com; Kensington Gore SW7; ⊖ South Kensington) A splendid Victorian arena that often hosts classical concerts, but is best known as the venue for the Proms.

Opera & Dance

Royal Opera House (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7304 4000; www.royaloperahouse.org; Royal Opera House, Bow St WC2; tickets £4-180; ⊖ Covent Garden) The once starchy and now gleaming Royal Opera House has been attracting a young, wealthy audience since its £213-million millennium redevelopment, which seems to have breathed new life into programming. The Royal Ballet, the best classical-ballet company in the land, is based here.

Sadler's Wells (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 737 7737; www.sadlers-wells.com; Rosebery Ave EC1; tickets £10-35; ⊖ Angel) A glittering modern venue that was in fact first established in the 17th century. It has been given much credit for bringing modern dance to the mainstream. There are several independent dance companies in London too.

Coliseum (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7632 8300; St Martin's Lane WC1; ⊖ Leicester Sq) The home of the progressive English National Opera.

Comedy

The thought of coming to London and not seeing some stand-up is laughable. With so many men and women tickling our funny bone, it's no wonder that there are numerous venues to choose from, and many pubs getting in on the act. As ever, *Time Out* has more details, but here are a couple to whet your appetite.

Comedy Store (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7344 4444; Haymarket House, 1a Oxendon St SW1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) One of the first comedy clubs in London, featuring the capital's most famous improvisers, the Comedy Store Players, on Wednesday and Saturday.

Comedy Café (Map p125; ☎ 7739 5706; 66-68 Rivington St EC2; ⊖ Old St) Have dinner and watch some comedy; take to the stage on Wednesday if you fancy a turn.

Cinemas

Glitzy British premieres usually take place in Leicester Sq at one of the mega multiplexes. You don't have to be a movie star to catch a flick here and they do show the blockbusters, but for a more local experience try a **Curzon** (☎ 0870 756 4621; www.curzoncinemas.com; Mayfair Map pp122-3; 38 Curzon St W1; Soho Map pp130-1; 99 Shaftesbury Ave W1), which show less mainstream releases too. There are also a clutch of independent cinemas spread out over the capital that make the cinema experience a particular treat. Check listings in *Time Out* for details.

National Film Theatre (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 3232; South Bank Centre SE1; ⊖ Waterloo) A film-lover's dream, it screens some 2000 flicks a year, ranging from vintage classics to foreign art house. There's also an informal drop-in cinema, viewing stations where you can select what you want to watch, a film shop and exhibition space.

Electric (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7908 9696; www.the-electric.co.uk; 191 Portobello Rd W11; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) Grab a glass of wine from the bar and wander inside to your leather sofa to snuggle down for a good movie, or a Sunday double-bill. Tickets are cheapest on Mondays. All cinemas should be like this.

London IMAX (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 787 2525; www.bfi.org.uk/imax; Waterloo SE1; ⊖ Waterloo) Watch 3-D movies and cinema releases on the UK's biggest screen at 20m high (nearly five double-decker buses) and 26m wide.

Sport

As the capital of a sports-mad nation, you can expect London to be brimming over with sporting spectacles throughout the year. As always, the entertainment weekly *Time Out* is the best source of information on fixtures, times, venues and ticket prices.

FOOTBALL

Tickets for Premier League football matches are ridiculously hard to come by for casual fans these days, and London's top-flight clubs play to full stadiums most weeks. But if you

JIMMY CARR'S LONDON

Award-winning stand-up comic, TV and radio presenter, star of the film *Confetti*, and author of *The Naked Jape*, Jimmy Carr has called North London's Islington home for the last four years. We met him to chat about this bustling, smoky city.

'London has the strongest stand-up comedy scene in the world. There are so many clubs and places to play and there's a real tradition for live acts, which probably goes back to the days of music hall.' Like a comic's version of a cabbie's 'Knowledge' (see p181), Jimmy can tell you the nearest restaurant, bar and bus/tube stop to pretty much every comedy venue in London. For those not blessed with his encyclopaedic knowledge he recommends www.chortle.co.uk for info on the comedy scene.

Despite finding his first gig 'petrifying' and believing 'there's something generally wrong with comics – they're the only people in the room facing the wrong way', he's continued to master his own brand of hilariously transgressive humour. We asked him what made the British sense of humour special and he explained 'word play is at the heart of it – because of the richness of the English language there's so much you can say', concluding 'everything that's British can be summed up in a neat little joke'. As he points out, the Brits take pride in laughing at themselves and 'to say that someone can't take a joke is very scathing'.

Jimmy loves London's 'variety – the little villages, communities and neighbourhoods that are all so different', and the fact that 'there's always so much going on and even a local can feel like a tourist, discovering new places'. He gets his inspiration 'from everyday life' and tests his material in small venues like the **Hen & Chickens Theatre** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7704 2001; 109 St Paul's Rd N1; ⊖ Highbury & Islington).

For Jimmy, London is ripe with potential gags. 'A shop has recently opened up round the corner from my house called the Duke of Yuke selling ukulelies only. It's common in London to find shops named after bad puns – I know a 'Lunatic Fringe' hairdressers too – and/or selling a highly specific (if not particularly useful) item. Every time I pass the Duke of Yuke on my way home, I phone my girlfriend to say 'I'm just by the Duke of Yuke, do you need anything?'. And that's what's so great about London.'

To check out Jimmy's next gig, see www.jimmycarr.com.

want to try your luck, the telephone numbers for some Premiership clubs are listed here:

Arsenal (☎ 7704 4040)
Charlton (☎ 0871 226 1905)
Chelsea (☎ 0870 300 2322)
Fulham (☎ 0870 442 1234)
Tottenham Hotspur (☎ 0870 420 5000)
West Ham United (☎ 0870 112 2700)

RUGBY

Twickenham (☎ 8892 2000; Rugby Rd, Twickenham; tickets around £40, more for internationals; ⊖ Hounslow East, then bus 281 or Twickenham main-line station) is the home of English rugby union, but as with football, tickets for internationals are difficult to get unless you have contacts. The ground also boasts the state-of-the-art **Museum of Rugby** (☎ 0870 405 2001; admission incl stadium tour £9; 🕘 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun).

CRICKET

After a blinding triumph in the 2005 Ashes followed by a bitter defeat the following year, cricket still rouses people's passions in the land of its origin. Test matches take place at two venerable grounds: **Lord's Cricket Ground** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7432 1066; St John's Wood Rd NW8; ⊖ St John's Wood) and the **Brit Oval** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7582 7764; Kennington Oval SE11; ⊖ Oval). Tickets are from £15 to £50, but if you're a fan it's worth it.

SHOPPING

From world-famous department stores to quirky backstreet retail revelations, London is a mecca for shoppers with an eye for style and a card to exercise. If you're looking for something distinctly 'British', eschew the Union Jack–emblazoned kitsch of the tourist thoroughfares and fill your bags with Burberry accessories, Paul Smith shirts, Royal Doulton china and Marmite. Or you could just visit some of the stores listed here…

Department Stores

It's hard to resist the lure of London's famous department stores, even if you don't intend to spend up.

Harrods (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7730 1234; 87 Brompton Rd SW1; ⊖ Knightsbridge) Like a theme park for fans of the British establishment, Harrods is always crowded with slow tourists.

Harvey Nichols (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7235 5000; 109-125 Knightsbridge SW1; ⊖ Knightsbridge) Harvey Nicks is London's temple of high fashion. The jewellery and perfume departments are divine.

Fortnum & Mason (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 8040; 181 Piccadilly W1; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) The byword for quality and service from a bygone area, steeped as it is in 300 years of tradition. It is especially noted for its old-world ground-floor food hall where Britain's elite come for their cornflakes and bananas.

Selfridges (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 837 7377; 400 Oxford St W1; ⊖ Bond St) The funkiest and most vital of London's one-stop shops, where fashion runs the gamut from street to formal. The food hall is unparalleled and the cosmetics hall the largest in Europe.

Liberty (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 1234; 214-220 Regent St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) An irresistible blend of contemporary styles in an old-fashioned atmosphere. And you can't leave London without some 'Liberty Florals' (printed fabrics).

Fashion

If there's a label worth having, you'll find it in central London. Oxford St is the place for high-street fashion, while the chains of Regent St crank it up a notch. Kensington High St has a nice mix of chains and boutiques, while the Covent Garden area is crammed with groovy labels – try Monmouth St for vintage fashion and the risqué Coco de Mer. South Molton St is a must for shoes. Bond St has designers galore, while Knightsbridge draws the hordes with quintessentially English department stores. Savile Row has bespoke tailoring, and Jermyn St is the place for sir to buy his smart togs (particularly shirts). Look out for dress agencies which sell secondhand designer clothes, bags and shoes – there are particularly rich pickings in the wealthier parts of town.

Burberry (Map pp130-1; ☎ ; 21-23 New Bond St W1; ⊖ Bond St) Friend of Kate Moss and Sienna Miller, British designer Christopher Bailey is making Burberry cool again.

Cath Kidston (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 6555; 51 Marylebone High St W1; ⊖ Baker St) A feast of vintage-style floral prints and polka dots on just about every kind of accessory.

Giles by Giles Deacon (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 1234; Selfridges, 400 Oxford St W1; ⊖ Bond St) London's favourite designer dresses women in saucy but sophisticated style.

Paul Smith Sale Shop (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7493 1287; 23 Avery Row W1; ⊖ Bond St) Classic Paul Smith big-print shirts and other delights by London's most commercially successful designer, at a discounted price.

Mulberry (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7493 2546; 11-12 Gees Ct W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Spend your return air fare on the 'it' bag of the moment.

Coco Ribbon (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7730 8555; 21 Kensington Park Rd W11; ⊖ 7229 4904; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) A shabby-chic emporium selling delicious girly loveliness like honeymoon bikinis proclaiming your new status, beauty books and feathery negligees.

Start (Map p125; ☎ 7629 1234; 42-44 Rivington St EC2; ⊖ Old St) *The* place to purchase designer jeans.

Primark (Map pp116-17 ☎ 8748 7119; Kings Mall, King St W6; ⊖ Hammersmith) Also known as 'Primarni' by the fashion editors who shop here. Brilliant for catwalk copies at a fraction of the price, but be prepared – you may have to fight for them.

TK Maxx (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8563 9200; 57 King St W6; ⊖ Hammersmith) Up to 60% off designer fashion.

Top Shop Oxford Circus (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7629 1234; 216 Oxford St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Billed as the 'world's largest fashion store', Top Shop is a must for any budding fashionista. So hip

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

London has more than 350 markets selling everything from antiques and curios to flowers and fish. Some, such as Camden and Portobello Rd, are well known to tourists, while others exist just for the locals and have everything from dinner to underwear for sale in the stalls. Here's a sample.

Bermondsey Market (Map pp116-17; Bermondsey Sq SE1; 🕘 4am-3pm Fri; ⊖ Borough) The place to come if you're after old opera glasses, bowling balls, hatpins, costume jewellery, porcelain or other curios. The main market is outdoors on the square, although adjacent warehouses shelter the more vulnerable furnishings and bric-a-brac.

Borough Market (Map p125; cnr Borough High & Stoney Sts SE1; 🕘 noon-6pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat; ⊖ London Bridge) A farmers market sometimes called London's Larder, it has been here in some form since the 13th century. It's a wonderfully atmospheric food market, where you'll find everything from organic falafel to a boar's head.

Brick Lane Market (Map p125; Brick Lane E1; 🕘 early-2pm Sun; ⊖ Aldgate East) This is an East End pearl, a sprawling bazaar featuring everything from fruit and veggies to paintings and bric-a-brac.

Brixton Market (Map pp116-17; Electric Ave & Granville Arcade SW9; 🕘 10am-dusk Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Wed; ⊖ Brixton) A cosmopolitan treat that mixes everything from the Body Shop and reggae to slick Muslim preachers, South American butcher shops and exotic fruits. On Electric Ave and in the covered Granville Arcade you can buy wigs, unusual foods and spices, and homeopathic root cures.

Camden Market (Map pp118-19; Camden High St NW1; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm; ⊖ Camden Town) One of London's most popular tourist attractions although it stopped being cutting edge a long time ago. It's positively mobbed at the weekend.

Camden Lock Market (Map pp118-19; Camden Lock Pl NW1; 🕘 10am-6pm; ⊖ Camden Town) Jewellery, bags, holistic therapies, gifts, posters, fashion and cafés for a post-retail cuppa.

Camden Passage Market (Map pp118-19; Camden Passage N1; 🕘 10am-2pm Wed, 10am-5pm Sat; ⊖ Angel) Get your fill of antiques and trinkets galore. Not in Camden (despite the name).

Columbia Road Flower Market (Map p125; Columbia Rd E2; 🕘 8am-2pm Sun; ⊖ Old St) An unbeatably beguiling mix of East End barrow boys selling bouquets and locals scouring the surrounding antiques, jewellery, perfume and porcelain shops with their hands full of foliage.

Petticoat Lane Market (Map p125; Wentworth St & Middlesex St E1; 🕘 9am-2pm Mon-Fri & Sun; ⊖ Aldgate, Aldgate East or Liverpool St) A cherished East End institution overflowing with cheap consumer durables of little interest to tourists (although you'll see a hell of a lot of them).

Portobello Road Market (Map pp120-1; Portobello Rd W10; 🕘 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Thu; ⊖ Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove or Westbourne Park) One of London's most famous (and crowded) street markets. New and vintage clothes are its main attraction.

Spitalfields Market (Map p125; Commercial St E1; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm Sun, organic market 9.30am-5pm Fri; ⊖ Liverpool St) In a Victorian warehouse, with a great mix of arts and crafts, clothes, books, food and fun.

Sunday (Up)market (Map p125; Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane E1; 🕘 10am-5pm Sun; ⊖ Liverpool St) A relatively recent addition to the East End market scene, Upmarket has handmade handbags, jewellery, new and vintage clothes and shoes, plus food if you need refuelling.

it shows at London Fashion Week and the Parisians have been crying out for their own branch (they've now got one). Where London leads…

Butler & Wilson (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 8255; 189 Fulham Rd SW3; ⊖ South Kensington) Beautiful costume jewellery, antique baubles and vintage clothing.

EC One (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7713 6185; 41 Exmouth Market EC1; ⊖ Farringdon) Husband-and-wife team Jos and Alison Skeates sell beautiful contemporary collections by British and international jewellery designers.

Rigby & Peller (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7491 2200; 22A Conduit St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Revamp your lingerie with a trip to the Queen's corsetière.

Antiques

Curios, baubles and period pieces abound along Camden Passage, Bermondsey Market, the Saturday market at Portobello and along Islington's Upper St from Angel towards Highbury Corner (see p177 for market details).

Antiquarius Antiques Centre (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7969 1500; 131 King's Rd SW3; ⊖ Sloane Sq) Packed with 120 stalls and dealers selling everything from top hats and corkscrews to old luggage and jewellery.

London Silver Vaults (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7242 3844; 53-63 Chancery Lane WC2; ⊖ Chancery Lane) Has 72 subterranean shops forming the world's largest collection of silver under one roof.

Music

If it's been recorded, you can buy it in London. For the biggest general collections of CDs and tapes, take on the West End giants of **Virgin Megastore** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 2500; 1 Piccadilly Circus W1; 🕒 until 11pm Mon-Sat; ⊖ Piccadilly Circus) and **HMV** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7631 3423; 150 Oxford St W1; 🕒 until 8.30pm Mon-Sat, until 9pm Thu; ⊖ Oxford Circus), which both have many central branches.

For personality, visit the following:

Rough Trade Neal's Yard (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7240 0105; 16 Neal's Yard WC2; ⊖ Covent Garden); Talbot Rd (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 8541; 130 Talbot Rd W11; ⊖ Ladbroke Grove) In the Covent Garden basement of Slam City Skates, it's the most central outlet of this famous store that was at the forefront of the punk explosion in the 1970s. This – and its original store in Notting Hill – is the best place to come for underground specials, vintage rarities and pretty much anything of an indie or alternative bent.

Ray's Jazz Shop (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 5660; Foyle's, 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ⊖ Tottenham Court Rd) Where aficionados will find those elusive back catalogues from their favourite jazz and blues artists.

BM Soho (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 0478; 25 D'Arblay St W1; ⊖ Oxford Circus) Your best bet for dance, and if they haven't got what you're after, they'll know who has.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

London is the major gateway to Britain, so further transport information can be found in the main Transport chapter.

Air

For information on flying to/from London see p965.

Bus

Most long-distance coaches leave London from **Victoria coach station** (Map p128; ☎ 7730 3466; 164 Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; ⊖ Victoria, then about a 10min walk), a lovely 1930s-style building. The arrivals terminal is in a separate building across Elizabeth St from the main coach station.

Car

See p970 for reservation numbers of the main car-hire firms, all of which have airport and various city locations.

MADE IN CLERKENWELL

Support local craftspeople with a trip to **Made in Clerkenwell** (Map pp118-19; www.cga.org.uk; admission £2.50), run by the Clerkenwell Green Association charity (CGA).

Formed in 1970 to support traditional trades (including the famous clock-makers), which were in danger of being lost, the CGA opens its historic Pennybank Chambers and Cornwell House to the public every summer and winter (see website for dates) so visitors can meet the craftspeople and see them at work. Wandering through the maze of tiny studios meeting milliners, jewellery-makers, silversmiths, ceramicists, bag-makers, artists, antiques restorers and musical instrument–makers is a fascinating window into another world. And if you fancy a souvenir, you can often pick up unique hand-crafted pieces at a good price.

Train

London has 10 main-line terminals, all linked by the tube and each serving a different geographical area of the UK.

Charing Cross (Map pp130-1) Southeast England.
Euston (Map pp118–19) Northern and northwest England, Scotland.
King's Cross (Map pp118–19) North London, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, northern and northeast England, Scotland.
Liverpool Street (Map p125) East and northeast London, Stansted airport, East Anglia.
London Bridge (Map p125) Southeast England.
Marylebone (Map pp120–1) Northwest London, the Chilterns.
Paddington (Map pp120–1) South Wales, western and southwest England, southern Midlands, Heathrow airport.
St Pancras (Map pp118–19) East Midlands, southern Yorkshire.
Victoria (Map p128) Southern and southeast England, Gatwick airport, Channel ferry ports.
Waterloo (Map pp122–3) Southwest London, southern and southwest England, St Pancras and Waterloo.

Most stations now have left-luggage facilities (around £4) and lockers, toilets (a 20p coin) with showers (around £3), newsstands and bookshops, and a range of eating and drinking outlets. Victoria and Liverpool St stations have shopping centres attached.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airports

HEATHROW

The airport is accessible by bus, the Underground (between 5am and 11pm), main-line train and taxi. The fastest way to and from central London is on the **Heathrow Express** (☎ 0845 600 1515; www.heathrowexpress.co.uk), an ultramodern train to and from Paddington station (one way £14.50, return £27, 15 minutes, every 15 minutes 5.10am to 11.30pm). You can purchase tickets on board (£2 extra), online or from self-service machines (cash and credit cards accepted) at both terminals.

The cheapest way between Heathrow and central London is on London Underground's Piccadilly line (£4, one hour, departing every five to 10 minutes 5.30am to 11.45pm), accessed from all terminals. Note that there are often vast queues at the Underground's ticket office. Get some £1 coins when you exchange money, and buy a ticket at the automatic machine instead.

A black cab to the centre of London will cost you around £50, a minicab around £30.

GATWICK

The **Gatwick Express train** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk) runs nonstop between Victoria train station and the South Terminal (adult one way/return £14/25, 30 minutes, departing every 15 minutes 5.50am to 1.35am, with an earlier train at 5.20am). The normal train service is slower but cheaper. A black cab to/from central London costs around £80 to £85.

STANSTED

The **Stansted Express** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.stanstedexpress.com) connects with Liverpool St station (one way/return £15/25, 45 minutes, departing every 15 minutes 6am to 12.30pm, otherwise every 30 minutes). The **Airbus A6** (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) links with Victoria coach station (one way/return £10/16, departing every 20 minutes 5.30am to midnight). A black cab to/from central London costs about £100 to £105.

LONDON CITY

The Docklands Light Railway (DLR) runs between City Airport and the following London stations: Bank (22 minutes), Canning Town (eight minutes), Canary Wharf (14 minutes). Tickets cost £3 one way. A black taxi costs around £25 to/from central London.

LUTON

First Capital Connect (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) runs trains from King's Cross and other central London stations to Luton Airport Parkway station (adult/child one way £11.20/5.60, 35 minutes, departing every five to 15 minutes 7am to 10pm), from where a shuttle bus will get you to the airport within eight minutes. **easyBus** (www.easybus.co.uk) minibuses run between Luton airport and central London (Gloucester Place, near Baker St) at tasty one-way prices that start from £2 (online advance bookings) or £8 (on-board fare). A black taxi costs around £95 to/from central London.

Car

Driving in London is not for the faint-hearted. Traffic is very heavy, parking is a nightmare and wheel-clampers keep busy. If you drive into central London from 7am to 6.30pm on a weekday, you'll need to pay an £8 per day congestion charge (visit www.cclondon.com to register) or face a hefty fine.

Public Transport

Transport for London (TfL; www.tfl.gov.uk) aims to integrate the entire London transport network. Its website has a handy journey planner and information on all transport in the capital.

Servicing a city this large is clearly a logistical nightmare for planners, who get plenty of criticism from locals. But amazingly, the system works pretty well, especially since Mayor Ken Livingstone has made it his cause célèbre. Trains, tube lines, day and night buses, cabs and even shuttle boats work in tandem to fill the gaps and make it possible to navigate the behemoth (unless you're trying to get out of Soho on a weekend night, of course).

A Travelcard (see right) can be used on all forms of public transport as can the prepay **Oystercard** (www.oystercard.com), which offers cheaper fares and is recommended for an extended stay.

BOAT

Myriad boats ply the Thames, with more services being announced all the time. Travelling by boat avoids traffic jams while affording great views. Travelcard holders get one-third off all fares.

City Cruises (☎ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com) operates year-round from Westminster Pier (for more details see p153).

Westminster Passenger Services Association (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk) is the only company that operates a scheduled service upriver from Westminster. It takes in Kew Gardens and Hampton Park (for prices see Kew Gardens, p151).

London Waterbus Company (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7482 2660) runs trips between Camden Lock and Little Venice, or try **Jason's Canal Trips** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7286 3428; www.jasons.co.uk) at Little Venice. London has some 40 miles of inner-city canals, mostly built in the 19th century and in the process of renewal.

BUS

Travelling round London by double-decker bus is an enjoyable (and often efficient) way to explore the city and get a feel for its districts and size. It can seem more difficult than the tube though so pick up a bus map from an Underground station. A recommended 'scenic' route is number 24, which runs from Victoria to Hampstead Heath through the West End.

Buses run regularly between 7am and midnight. Single-journey bus tickets (valid for two hours) cost £1.50, day passes are £3.50. If you're planning to bus it a lot it's worth buying a book of six tickets for £6. Children ride for free. In central London, at stops with yellow signs you have to buy your ticket from the automatic machine *before* boarding.

Less-frequent night buses (prefixed with the letter 'N') wheel into action when the tube stops. They stop on request, so clearly signal the driver with an outstretched arm. Trafalgar Sq, Tottenham Court Rd and Oxford Circus are the main terminals for them.

Stationlink buses (☎ 7941 4600) have a driver-operated ramp for wheelchair access and follow a similar route to the Underground Circle Line, joining up all the main-line stations. From Paddington there are services clockwise (501) from 8.15am to 7.15pm, and anticlockwise (502) from 8.40am to 6.40pm.

DLR & TRAIN

The independent, driverless **Docklands Light Railway** (DLR; ☎ 7363 9700; www.dlr.co.uk) links the City at Bank and Tower Gateway with Canary Wharf, Greenwich and Stratford, providing good views of development at this end of town. The fares operate in the same way as those on the tube.

Several rail companies also operate suburban rail services in and around London. These are especially important south of the river where there are few tube lines. Once again, fares operate in the same way as those on the tube.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

The 12 'tube' lines extend as far as Buckinghamshire, Essex and Heathrow. There are Underground travel information centres at all Heathrow terminals, a half-dozen major tube stations and at larger main-line train stations. Services run from 5.30am to roughly midnight (from 7am on Sunday).

The Underground is divided into six concentric zones. The basic fare for Zone 1 is adult/child £3/1.50; to cross all six zones (eg to/from Heathrow) costs £4/2. Tickets can be bought from machines or counters at the entrance to each station.

If you're travelling through a few zones or several times in one day, consider a Travelcard. One-day Travelcards can be used on all transport: tubes, main-line trains, the DLR and buses (including night buses). Most visitors find a one-day Travelcard for Zones 1 and 2 (£4.90) is sufficient. Before 9.30am Monday to Friday, you need a Peak Travelcard (£6.20/3.10 for Zones 1 and 2). Three-day Travelcards cost £15.40/7.70. Children under 11 years can travel for free with an adult anytime after 9.30am.

Note that taking the tube for the miniscule journey between Covent Garden and Leicester Sq (£3 for 250m) is more expensive than taking a stretch limo.

Taxi

Wonderfully reliable black cabs are available for hire when the yellow light above the windscreen is lit. Fares are metered, with flag fall at £2.20 and each successive kilometre costing 90p. To order a black cab by phone, try **Dial-a-Cab** (☎ 7253 5000); you must pay by credit card and will be charged a premium.

Licensed minicabs are a cheaper alternative to cabs. To find a local minicab firm visit www.tfl.gov.uk/pco/findaride or if you're out and about and you need a minicab right now, text HOME to 60835 to get the telephone numbers for your two nearest minicab firms.

THE KNOWLEDGE

Taking a black cab is a quintessential London experience. It's more expensive than a minicab, but significantly more comfortable and reliable. To get an all-London licence, cabbies must do 'The Knowledge', which tests them on up to 25,000 streets within a 6-mile radius of Charing Cross and all the points of interest from hotels to churches. If you see people on mopeds with clipboards, they are probably revising. It's a feat that can sometimes take years to achieve, and ensures, according to the Public Carriage Office, that only the most committed join the noble trade. It also ensures you get the most direct route to your destination.

Be aware that there have been many reports of assault by unlicensed minicab drivers. Female travellers should not jump into an unlicensed minicab alone.

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The Marches

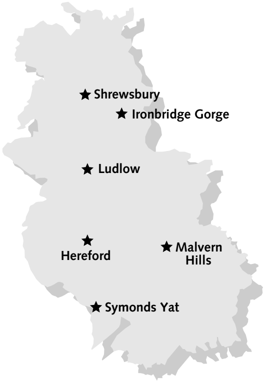
History buffs, hill-walkers and those hankering after a slice of rural England at its most charming will be well rewarded in the Marches. This tranquil border region with Wales ripples with dramatic hills and lush farmland, cider orchards and meandering rivers. Its inhabitants exude unfeigned warmth towards visitors, and a disarming balance between Welsh and English culture prevails.

While it may be peaceful today, the Marches has a gripping history. Its bucolic landscapes are littered with battle-scarred castles and timeworn ruins testifying to the ferocious fighting that rocked this region for many centuries. Picturesque black-and-white villages from the Middle Ages seem to nestle down every country lane, and venerable cathedrals grace Worcester and Hereford. World-changing events have also taken place in this quiet corner of England; Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire was the scene of technological breakthroughs that poured rocket fuel on the first tentative flames of the Industrial Revolution.

But this region offers far more than simply a workout for your grey cells and camera batteries. It has more than its share of heart-pumping scenery and muscle-warming walks too, especially in the beautiful south Shropshire Hhills and the soaring peaks around Great Malvern. The River Wye also snakes its way through Herefordshire, drawing canoeists from across the country. But whether you choose to explore the region on foot or by paddle, pedal or four wheels, you can be assured of some splendid and surprisingly under-visited

HIGHLIGHTS

- Being awed by the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, **Ironbridge Gorge** (p397)
- Seeing the world through medieval eyes at Hereford's **Mappa Mundi** (p389)
- Feeding your inner foodie in gourmet Mecca, **Ludlow** (p404)
- Donning your hiking boots and roam the lush **Malvern Hills** (p387)
- Getting lost amid the black-and-white streets of **Shrewsbury** (p394)
- Paddling your way down the River Wye from tranquil **Symonds Yat** (p392)



- POPULATION: ONE MILLION
- AREA: 2541 SQ MILES

History

The Marches has seen territorial scuffles and all-out battles rage for centuries. These conflicts took place between feuding kingdoms along what is today the border separating England and Wales. In the 8th century the Anglo-Saxon king Offa of Mercia built an earthwork barricade along the border to try to quell the ongoing tension. It became known as Offa's Dyke, and much of it is still traceable as a popular walking route today.

In an effort to subdue the Welsh and secure his new kingdom, William the Conqueror set up powerful, feudal barons – called Lords Marcher after the Anglo-Saxon word *mearc*, meaning 'boundary' – along the border, from where they repeatedly raided Wales, taking as much territory as possible under their control.

Activities

The Marches is ripe with beautiful walking and cycling routes, snaking through pastoral idylls, wooded valleys and gentle hills. But not all the action is on terra firma – there are opportunities for fun in the water and sky too. See the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83) and county-specific Activities sections in this chapter for more information.

CYCLING

There are plenty of good reasons to get saddle-sore in the Marches. Shropshire in particular is ideal for touring, and you can rent bikes in Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Ludlow, Ironbridge and Ledbury.

Areas apt for off-road biking include the woods of Hopton near Ludlow, as well as Eastridge near Shrewsbury. High-level riding on the Long Mynd above Church Stretton is also rewarding.

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

To tour the countryside from your own base, try these websites for self-catering properties:

Eco Cabin (www.ecocabin.co.uk)
Farm Stay Worcs (www.farmstayworcs.co.uk)
Shropshire Cottages (www.shropshirecottages.com)
Shropshire Tourism (www.shropshiretourism.info/self-catering-accommodation)
Wye Lea (www.wyelea.co.uk)

In Herefordshire, you'll find the **Ledbury Loop** – a 17-mile rural circuit based around the town of Ledbury.

A pack of route maps and notes called *Cycling for Pleasure in the Marches* is available from tourist offices for £6. Tourist offices also stock many free route leaflets, and you can find info on newly opened stretches of National Cycle Route 45 through Shropshire and Worcestershire from the **National Cycle Network** (www.sustrans.org) or download leaflets from www.shropshire.gov.uk/cycling.nsf.

WALKING

One of many great routes on which to muddy your hiking boots, the glorious **Offa's Dyke** is a 177-mile national trail following an ancient earthen border defence. Running south–north from Chepstow to Prestatyn, it passes through some of the most spectacular scenery in Britain, but it's not for the inexperienced or unfit.

A less taxing option is the gentle 107-mile **Wye Valley Walk**, which follows the course of the River Wye from Chepstow upstream to Rhayader in Wales. Another firm favourite is the beautiful 100-mile **Three Choirs Way** linking the cathedral cities of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester.

Shorter walks include the famous ridges of Wenlock Edge (p401) and the lovely Long Mynd (p401). These are in turn swallowed by the circular 136-mile **Shropshire Way**, which loops from Shrewsbury south to Ludlow.

One of the loveliest spots of all is the Malvern Hills (p387), offering easy paths and breathtaking views on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

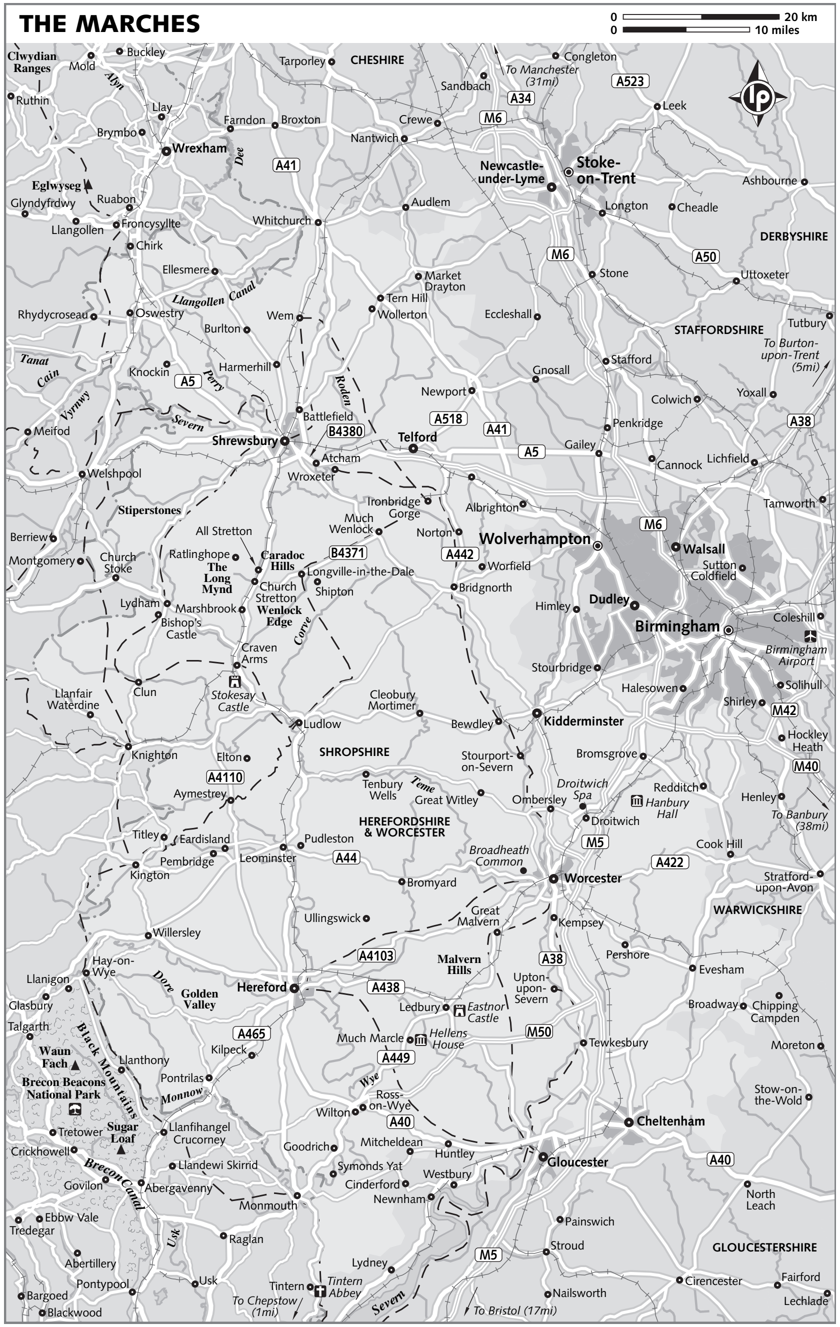
For more ideas, see the Activities sections of each county in this chapter.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Both easy-grade canoeing and white-water fun can be had at Symonds Yat (p392) on the River Wye, while the river gorge's rocky buttresses are also a popular rock-climbing spot. The Long Mynd is renowned for its gliding and paragliding, with facilities in Church Stretton. Or for something completely different, tourist offices can point you towards hotspots for mountainboarding.

Getting Around

Public transport can be a hit-and-miss affair in the largely rural Marches. Without your own wheels, getting to countryside attractions


THE MARCHES
0 20 km
0 10 miles
Clwydian Ranges
Buckley
Mold
Ruthin
Alyn
Tarporley
CHESHIRE
Congleton
To Manchester (31mi)
Sandbach
A34
A523
Leek
Llay
Farndon
Broxton
Crewe
M6
Brymbo
Nantwich
Wrexham
Dee
A41
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Stoke-on-Trent
Ashbourne
Eglwyseg
Glyndyfrdwy
Ruabon
Audlem
Longton
Cheadle
Llangollen
Froncysyllte
Whitchurch
Chirk
M6
DERBYSHIRE
A50
Stone
Uttoxeter
Ellesmere
Market Drayton
Llangollen Canal
Tern Hill
Wollerton
Rhydycroesau
Oswestry
Wem
Eccleshall
STAFFORDSHIRE
Tutbury
Burlton
To Burton-upon-Trent (5mi)
Tanat
Cain
Harmerhill
Stafford
Knockin
Gnosall
A5
Perry
Roden
Vyrnwy
Newport
Colwich
Yoxall
Severn
Battlefield
A518
Meifod
B4380
A41
Penkridge
A38
Shrewsbury
Telford
A5
Gailey
Atcham
Lichfield
Welshpool
Wroxeter
Cannock
Ironbridge Gorge
Albrighton
Tamworth
Stiperstones
Much Wenlock
M6
Berriew
All Stretton
Norton
Wolverhampton
Walsall
Church Stoke
Ratlinghope
Caradoc Hills
B4371
A442
Montgomery
The Long Mynd
Longville-in-the-Dale
Worfield
Sutton Coldfield
Church Stretton
Shipton
Bridgnorth
Lydham
Wenlock Edge
Marshbrook
Himley
Dudley
Coleshill
Bishop's Castle
Corve
Birmingham
Birmingham Airport
Craven Arms
Stourbridge
Halesowen
Solihull
Clun
Stokesay Castle
Cleobury Mortimer
Shirley
Llanfair Waterdine
Ludlow
Bewdley
Kidderminster
M42
Hockley Heath
Knighton
Elton
SHROPSHIRE
Stourport-on-Severn
Bromsgrove
A4110
M40
Tenbury Wells
Teme
Droitwich Spa
Redditch
Aymestrey
Great Witley
Ombersley
Hanbury Hall
Henley
To Banbury (38mi)
HEREFORDSHIRE & WORCESTER
Droitwich
Titley
Eardisland
Pudleston
M5
Cook Hill
Pembridge
Leominster
Broadheath Common
Kington
A44
A422
Bromyard
Worcester
Stratford-upon-Avon
WARWICKSHIRE
Ullingswick
Great Malvern
Kempsey
Willersley
A4103
Malvern Hills
A38
Pershore
Hay-on-Wye
Evesham
Llanigon
Dore
Golden Valley
Hereford
A438
Upton-upon-Severn
Glasbury
Ledbury
Eastnor Castle
Broadway
Chipping Campden
Talgarth
A465
Black Mountains
Kilpeck
Much Marcle
Hellens House
M50
Tewkesbury
Moreton
Waun Fach
Llanthony
A449
Brecon Beacons National Park
Pontrilas
Wye
Stow-on-the-Wold
Monnow
Ross-on-Wye
Wilton
A40
Cheltenham
Tretower
Sugar Loaf
Llanfihangel Crucorney
Goodrich
Mitcheldean
Huntley
Crickhowell
Symonds Yat
Westbury
Gloucester
A40
Llandewi Skirrid
Brecon Canal
Govilon
Cinderford
Abergavenny
Newnham
North Leach
Monmouth
Ebbw Vale
Tredegar
Painswich
Raglan
Usk
Stroud
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Abertillery
Lydney
M5
Pontypool
Usk
Tintern
Tintern Abbey
Cirencester
Fairford
Bargoed
To Chepstow (1mi)
Severn
Nailsworth
Lechlade
Blackwood
To Bristol (17mi)

takes time, planning and patience. Tourist offices stock timetables for most rural routes, or you can consult **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinemidlands.co.uk).

Railway lines radiate from Shrewsbury, Hereford and Worcester, but they generally only serve larger towns.

The main bus operators:

Arriva (☎ 0870 120 1088; www.arrivabus.co.uk) An Arriva Go Anywhere ticket (£6.50) gives one day of unlimited travel.

First Travel (☎ 0800 587 7381; www.firstgroup.com) A FirstDay Wyvern ticket (adult/child £4.50/3) offers the same deal on the First network in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and adjoining counties.

WORCESTERSHIRE

Verdant hills honeycombed with springs and crisscrossed by beautiful walking trails thrust up alluringly over the south and west sides of serene Worcestershire. Though the northern and eastern plains offer little to visitors, plump in its regional heart is the capital, Worcester, boasting a fascinating cathedral and the world-renowned Royal Worcester Porcelain works. The dignified hillside Victorian resort of Great Malvern and the rolling Malvern Hills (the Malverns) beckon just south.

Information

For online information check out www.worcestershire-tourism.co.uk and for news try www.thisisworcestershire.co.uk.

Activities

The longest riverside walk in the UK, the **Severn Way** winds its way through Worcestershire via Worcester and Upton-upon-Severn, while the **Three Choirs Way** links Worcester to Hereford and Gloucester.

Cyclists can pick up the handy *Elgar Ride Variations* leaflet from tourist offices detailing routes around the Malverns.

Getting Around

There are a few regular rail links from Worcester and Kidderminster is the southern railhead of the popular Severn Valley Railway. Buses to rural areas can be frustratingly infrequent.

WORCESTER

☎ 01905 / pop 94,029

An ancient cathedral city on the banks of the River Severn, Worcester (*woos*-ter) is sprinkled with stark reminders of its eventful history, though postwar city planners have hardly set out to highlight them. Turn a blind eye to the chain stores and multistoreys that nuzzle its architectural gems, however, and you'll be rewarded with a magnificent cathedral, pockets of timber-framed Tudor and elegant Georgian architecture, riverside walks, and tales of the English Civil War, which finished here.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 726311; www.visitworcester.com; Guildhall, High St; 🕓 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) will organise 1½-hour **walking tours** (☎ 222117; www.worcesterwalks.co.uk; adult £3; 🕓 tours 11am Mon-Fri, 2.30pm Wed Apr-Sep). Internet access is available at **Coffee Republic** (☎ 25069; 31 High St; per 20min/1hr £1/3; 🕓 7am-6pm), opposite the Guildhall.

Sights

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

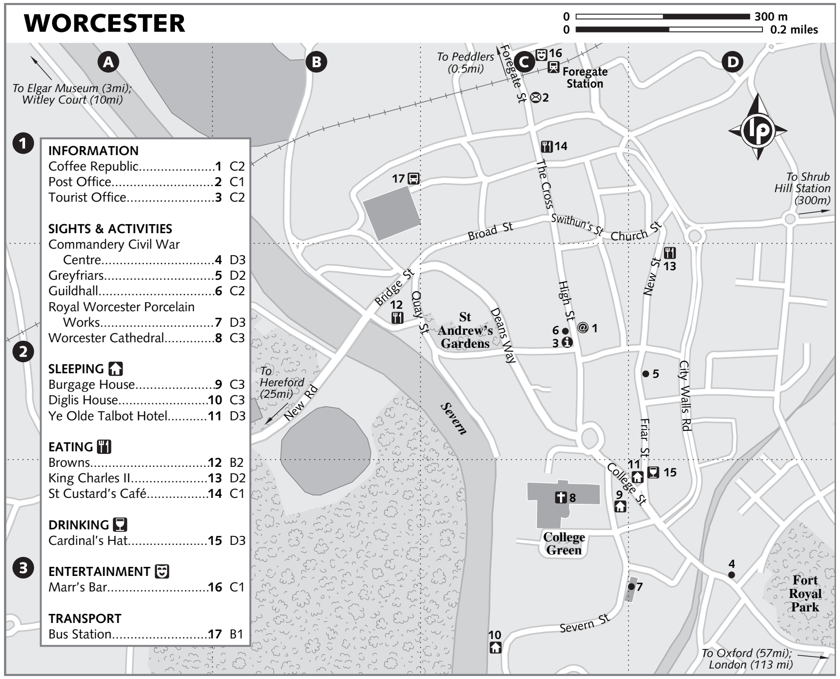
If there's one overriding reason to visit Worcester, *this* is it. A majestic edifice presiding over the city centre and river, **Worcester Cathedral** (☎ 28854; www.worcestercathedral.org.uk; suggested donation £3; 🕓 7.30am-6pm) amalgamates a rich medley of styles and eras, and is full of the stories and symbols of Britain's violent past.

The eerie Norman crypt is the largest in England and dates to when the cathedral was begun in 1084 by Saint Wulfstan, the only Saxon bishop to hang on to his see under the Normans. Other highlights include a striking 13th-century Lady Chapel and a lovely 12th-century circular chapterhouse.

You'll find the cathedral's most notorious inhabitant, King John, buried in the choir. Famous for his treachery towards older brother Richard Lionheart, and squabbles with the barons that forced him to sign Magna Carta, John left England in chaos and in a somewhat fitting break from tradition the stone lion under his feet is biting back. To boost his slim chances of passing the pearly gates, the dying king asked to be buried disguised as a monk.

The strong legged can tackle the 249 steps up the **tower** (admission £1.50; 🕓 10am-4pm Sat & school holidays Easter-Sep); once up top, spare a thought for the unhappy Charles II, who surveyed his troops from here during the Battle of Worcester.

One-hour long **cathedral tours** (adult/child £3/free) run from the gift shop at 11am and 2pm Monday to Saturday from April to September. Evensong is a splendid affair; it's held at 5.30pm Monday to Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and at 4pm Sunday.



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COMMANDERY CIVIL WAR CENTRE

Set to reopen after a major overhaul in early 2007, the **Commandery** (☎ 361821; www.worcestercitymuseums.org.uk; adult/child £4/3; 🕓 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a splendid Tudor building with a painted chamber containing important frescoes from the 15th century. It also houses exhibits detailing the ins and outs of the Civil War; the city was a key Royalist stronghold until defeat in the 1651 Battle of Worcester.

ROYAL WORCESTER PORCELAIN WORKS

This venerated old-timer of British porcelain manufacture has come a long way since founder Dr John Wall started making ornate bone china as a hobby in 1751. Granted a royal warrant in 1789, the factory still supplies Her Royal Highness (HRH) with some of her preferred crockery, and now runs an entire visitor complex to promote its wares.

Worth visiting even for those that aren't potty about pottery, the **Worcester Porcelain Museum** (☎ 746000; www.worcesterporcelainmuseum.org.uk; Severn St; adult/concession £5/4.25; 🕓 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) enlivens its exhaustive collection of works with quirky asides detailing everything from the china's use by British Royals to the factory's sidelines in porcelain dentures and 'portable fonts' designed for cholera outbreaks. Entry includes an audio tour.

The enjoyable **Visitor Experience Tour** (adult/concession £5/4.25; 🕓 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) walks visitors through the porcelain's design and manufacture. Combined tickets for the museum and tour cost £9/8 per adult/child.

You can browse the bewildering array of porcelain goodies in the on-site **shops**, from the daintiest traditional dinnerware to 'Cheeky Mugs' by Naked Chef Jamie Oliver.

HISTORICAL PROPERTIES

For more of Worcester's bulldozer-dodging buildings of old, stroll through the idyllic cathedral-side College Green, then amble down New St and Friar St, both lined with lovely Tudor and Elizabethan buildings.

You can duck inside a timber-framed merchant's house from 1480 at **Greyfriars** (NT; ☎ 23571;

Friar St; adult/child £3.60/1.90; ⏲ 1-5pm Wed-Sat Mar-Dec), which is full of atmospheric wood-panelled rooms and backed by a pretty walled garden. Also peek into the pompous 18th-century **Guildhall** (High St; ⏲ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), the creation of a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren who died in poverty after the city dragged its heels on paying him his dues.

Sleeping

Burgage House (☎ 25396; www.burgagehouse.co.uk; 4 College Precincts; s/d £35/60; ☒) A well-camouflaged little gem, hidden on a narrow cobbled street facing up to the cathedral, of which several rooms have unbeatable views. It's run in a charming, refined manner and the four spacious and elegantly decorated en-suite rooms are up a spiral staircase. Family friendly.

Ye Olde Talbot Hotel (☎ 23573; www.oldenglish.co.uk; Friar St; s/d £65/85; ☒) Attached to a popular bar and bistro bang in the town centre, this thoroughly renovated period inn is pretty good value. Rooms sport rich fabrics, deep colours, modern gadgets and an occasional smattering of antique features. Discounted parking is available nearby.

Diglis House (☎ 353518; www.diglishousehotel.co.uk; Severn St; s/d Fri-Sun from £75/90, Mon-Thu £90/100; 🅿 ☒ ♿) This polished 18th-century abode with a lovely terraced garden idyllically set by the river is surprisingly tranquil despite being a short stroll from town and close to a school. For name-droppers, the artist Constable was another visitor here.

Eating

In 2006 world-renowned 'chef's chef' Shaun Hill was poised to open a restaurant on Sidbury, on the corner ofCity Walls Rd: ask the tourist office for details.

St Custard's Café (☎ 26654; 4 the hop market; mains £6-7; ⏲ lunch Mon-Sat) A cheery café run by foodies that believe in honest fare for an even fairer price, which cooks up blackboard specials for both vegetarians and carnivores. A simple interior is complemented by fair-weather tables in the hop market courtyard outside.

King Charles II (☎ 22449; 29 New St; mains £8-14; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Rich in history and serving a fair Continental cuisine, this timber-framed building shelters an oak-panelled dining room with crimson carpet and lace tablecloths thought to be from the time when Charles II fled from Cromwell after losing the Battle of Worcester.

Browns (☎ 26263; 24 Quay St; mains £9.50-17, set dinner £33.50; ⏲ Tue-Sun) Housed in a converted Victorian corn mill adjacent to the river, with a pleasantly airy atmosphere, this is a classic British restaurant with a few French flavours sneaked in. It's a great place to impress a date.

Drinking

Cardinal's Hat (☎ 22066; 31 Friar St) At first glance a traditional old-English pub, split into several snug old-world rooms, this atmospheric Worcester institution now has a decidedly Austrian flavour. It sells Austrian beers in traditional steins and flutes and a choice of Austrian food at lunchtime.

Entertainment

Marr's Bar (☎ 613336; www.marrsbar.co.uk; 12 Pierpoint St) The best live-music venue for miles around, Marr's still has its original sprung dance floors from its days as a dance studio and you can bounce on them to your heart's content most nights thanks to packed listings. Gigs range from hard rock to world music.

Getting There & Around

Worcester has two stations but most trains run to Worcester Foregate (the other is Worcester Shrub Hill). Trains run hourly to London Paddington (£29.90, 2¼ to three hours) and Hereford (£8.40, 43 to 50 minutes).

National Express has several daily coaches to London changing in Birmingham (£18.30, four hours). Bus 44 runs twice-hourly to Great Malvern (30 minutes), bus 364 goes to Upton (30 minutes) hourly, and bus 417 goes to Ledbury (50 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday).

Bikes can be hired from **Peddlers** (☎ 24238; 46 Barbourne Rd; per day from £8).

AROUND WORCESTER

Elgar Birthplace Museum

Due pomp and circumstance is given to Britain's greatest classical composer at the **Elgar Museum** (☎ 01905-333224; www.elgarmuseum.org; Lower Broadheath; adult/child £5/2; ⏲ 11am-5pm), partly housed in the humble cottage in which he was born in 1857, 3 miles west of Worcester. You can browse an engrossing collection of the walrus-moustachioed composer's possessions, ranging from his gramophone and musical manuscripts to endearing doodlings in the morning paper. Admission includes an audio tour with musical interludes to appreciate what all the fuss is about.

Buses 310, 311 and 312 go from Worcester to Broadheath Common, a short walk from the museum (15 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

GREAT MALVERN

☎ 01684 / pop 35,558

Tumbling picturesquely down the slopes of the Malvern Hills, which soar suddenly upwards from the flat plains of Worcestershire, this well-heeled Victorian spa town still seems to exude health and wellbeing courtesy of its lush hill views, wide tree-lined avenues, rosy-cheeked inhabitants, booted hikers and its pure spring waters that bubble up in unexpected places. Today the medicinal waters that first attracted overindulgent Victorians are harnessed for a thriving bottled-water business.

The **tourist office** (☎ 892289; www.malvernhills.gov.uk; 21 Church St; ⏲ 10am-5pm) is brimming with walking and cycling information. Guided tours of the town (£3, 1½ hours) leave here at 10.30am on weekends. The **library** (☎ 566553; Graham Rd; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon, Fri-Sat & 9.30am-8pm Tue-Thu) has free internet access: bring ID.

In June the town goes music mad in the biannual **Elgar Festival** (☎ 892277; www.elgar-festival.com) to celebrate the life and works of the composer who lived nearby at Malvern Link.

Sights & Activities

MALVERN PRIORY

A treat even for those tired of England's draughty churches, the 11th-century **priory church** (☎ 561020; www.greatmalvernpriory.org.uk; Church St; suggested donation £3; ⏲ 9am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is lined by elephantine Norman pillars and shelters an entrancing collection of weird and wonderful 14th-century misericords under the tip-up seats of the monks' stalls. Every one a gem, depictions include three rats hanging a cat, and the mythological basilisk, and run through domestic labours of the months from the 15th century.

MALVERN MUSEUM OF LOCAL HISTORY

Straddling the pathway in the grand Priory Gatehouse (1470), the **Malvern Museum of Local History** (☎ 567811; adult/child £1.50/50p; ⏲ 10.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, except Wed during term-time) offers a small but thorough exploration of the things for which Great Malvern is renowned, from hills' geology to Victorian water cures.

MALVERN THEATRES

One of the country's best provincial theatres, **Malvern Theatre** (☎ 892277; www.malvern-theatres.co.uk; Grange Rd) packs in a lively programme of classical music, dance, comedy, drama and cinema.

Occupying a strange parallel universe in a converted Victorian men's lavatory decked out in theatrical Italianate flourishes, the **Theatre of Small Convenience** (☎ 568933; www.wctheatre.co.uk; Edith Walk) is one of the world's smallest theatres, seating just 12 people for acts that range from puppetry to opera.

WALKING

The jack-in-the-box Malvern Hills, which pop dramatically up out of the innocently low Severn plains on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, are made up of 18 named peaks; the highest of the bunch being Worcester Beacon at 419m. The hills are crisscrossed by more than 100 miles of paths; trail guides (£1.75) are available at the tourist office. More than 70 springs and fountains pouring out the famous medicinal waters are dotted around the hills, and the tourist office has a map guide (£3.95) to all of them.

Sleeping

Malvern Hills YHA (☎ 0870 770 5948; malvern@yha.org.uk; 18 Peachfield Rd, Malvern Wells; dm £10.95; ⏲ Easter-Oct) Muddy boots are welcome at this 58-bed hostel in an elegant Edwardian building, 1.5 miles south of town.

Como House (☎ 561486; www.comohouse.co.uk; Como Rd; s/d £36/56; 🅿 wi-fi) An explosion of lilac greets you to this handsome Malvern-stone converted schoolhouse. All three tastefully furnished rooms are south facing and the elaborate gardens, complete with a bridged pond and numerous statues, are a stunning feature. The owner picks guests up from the station and drops them at walking points.

Cowleigh Park Farm (☎ 566750; www.cowleighparkfarm.co.uk; Cowleigh Rd; s/d £45/65; 🅿 ☒) This 13th-century timber-framed farmhouse on the far northwestern brink of town is surrounded by countryside and overflows with bonhomie. You'll be greeted by friendly family dogs, and led up to oak-beamed rooms with sloping floors, tasteful furnishings and plentiful home comforts.

Bredon House Hotel (☎ 566990; www.bredonhousehotel.co.uk; 34 Worcester Rd; s/d from £45/80; 🅿 💻) A short saunter from the centre, this genteel Victorian B&B has superb views and courteous service. Rooms are decorated in a quirky but tasteful mix of new and old; one room even has a raised bath from which to enjoy the panorama while popping bubbles. Pets and children welcome.

Eating

St Ann's Well Cafe (☎ 560285; St Ann's Well; 🕐 lunch Apr-Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct-Mar) The pick of Malvern's doily-and-tea-cosy brigade is in a handsome early-19th-century villa atop a steep 99-step ascent from town. It rewards the climb with great vegetarian and vegan food, wholesome salads and eye-widening cakes, which you can wash down with fresh spring water that bubbles into a carved basin by the door.

Anupam (☎ 573814; 85 Church St; mains £8-11; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This stylish Indian restaurant, tucked just off the main road, is so passionate about flavours that it has its own range of blended spices. Walls coated in primary colours, and bubbly service put guests in a cheerful mood, and superb dishes such as *murg-e-nashilee* (chicken with onion and roasted poppy seed) keep them that way.

Getting There & Around

There are twice-hourly trains to Worcester (12 to 18 minutes) and roughly hourly trains to Hereford (£5.90, 30 minutes). Trains also go regularly to Ledbury (13 minutes).

National Express runs one bus daily to London (£18.60, four hours) via Worcester (20 minutes). Bus 44 connects Worcester (30 minutes) with Great Malvern hourly.

Handy for walkers, the Malvern Hills Hopper (five daily weekends and Bank Holidays mid-April to October) runs a hop-on, hop-off service through the hills to Upton-upon-Severn and Eastnor Castle.

HEREFORDSHIRE

An oasis of tranquillity, rural Herefordshire is scattered with quintessentially English villages of black-and-white timbered charm, a cherished sense of community and well-developed appreciation of the quiet life. Though it's challenging to get around, the effort is rewarded with bucolic landscapes of lush fields, twisting lanes and more than enough leafy orchards to whet your appetite for the county's famous ciders. The River Wye wiggles provocatively through the county, tempting canoeists from across the country. County capital Hereford hosts the superb medieval Mappa Mundi, and tip-toeing into Wales is renowned kingdom of books, Hay-on-Wye.

Information

For online county-wide information on attractions, accommodation and events:

Visit Heart of England (www.visitheartofengland.com)
Visit Herefordshire (www.visitherefordshire.co.uk)

Activities

Herefordshire is a haven for walkers, with several established long-distance paths meandering through it (see p382). Offa's Dyke Path hugs the Welsh border, while the 107-mile Wye Valley Walk begins in Chepstow (Wales) and follows the river upstream into Herefordshire. The Three Choirs Way is a 100-mile route connecting the cathedrals of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester, where the music festival of the same name has been celebrated for more than three centuries.

The newest addition to local long-distance tramps is the **Herefordshire Trail** (www.herefordshiretrail.com), a 150-mile circular loop linking Leominster, Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye and Kington.

Getting Around

Busy train stations with nationwide links can be found at Hereford, Leominster and Ledbury. To plan your way about, pick up a free *Public Transport Map & Guide* from tourist offices and bus stations, or go online through **Hereford Bus** (www.herefordbus.info) and **National Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinemidlands.co.uk).

HEREFORD

☎ 01432 / pop 56,353

Home to one of the most extraordinary sights in England, the magnificent medieval Mappa Mundi, the dignified cathedral city of Hereford straddles the River Wye plump in the centre of its county. Known largely for its cattle, cider and connections with the composer Elgar, it has a relatively provincial feel but an increasingly youthful energy fizzles along its riverside and centre.

Orientation & Information

The triangular, pedestrianised High Town is the city's heart, just north of the River Wye. The cathedral is close to the river, while the bus and train stations lie to the northeast, on Commercial Rd.

BLACK-&-WHITE VILLAGES

A lovely loop of Tudor England survives almost untouched in northwest Herefordshire, where higgledy-piggledy black-and-white villages cluster round idyllic greens, seemingly oblivious to the modern world. A wonderful 40-mile circular drive here follows the **Black & White Village Trail**, taking in the most handsome timber-framed buildings, old churches and convivial pubs. You can pick up a guide from any tourist office for 75p (there are also CD versions and an accommodation pamphlet available).

The route starts at Leominster and climaxes at chocolate-box perfect **Eardisland**. One of the prettiest villages is **Pembridge**, with its huddle of classic houses; it also makes a good base for touring the area, with lots of circular walks radiating from town and the Mortimer Trail just north of the village.

One superb place to eat and stay close by is the award-winning **Stagg Inn** (☎ 01544-230221; www.thestagg.co.uk; Titley; s £50-60, d £70-90; 🕐 closed Sun evening & Mon). This cosy country inn was the first pub to be awarded a Michelin star, and is a wonderfully welcoming place with roaring fires and antiques, stylish touches and a contemporary menu (mains £11 to £16) but with a traditional soul. It offers a handful of lovely rooms, making the roll home with a full and happy belly all the easier.

The 3-mile Titley Loop Walk begins here and winds through gorgeous countryside, making it a good way to work up an appetite.

The **tourist office** (☎ 268430; www.visitherefordshire.co.uk; 1 King St; 🕐 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is opposite the cathedral. **Guided walks** (walks £3; 🕐 11am Mon-Sat, 2.30pm Sun May-Sep) start from here. There's free internet access at the **library** (Broad St; 🕐 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Wed & Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Thu, 9.30am-4pm Sat) in the same building as the Hereford Museum & Art Gallery.

Sights

HEREFORD CATHEDRAL

After the Welsh torched the town's original cathedral, the new **Hereford Cathedral** (☎ 374200; www.herefordcathedral.co.uk; 5 College Cloisters; 🕐 7.30am-evensong) was begun on the same site in the 11th century. The building has evolved into a well-packaged lesson on the history of English architecture: the sturdy south transept is Norman but holds a 16th-century triptych; the exquisite north transept with its soaring windows dates from the 13th century; the choir and the tower date from the 14th; while the Victorian influence is visible almost everywhere.

But the cathedral is best known for two ancient treasures housed here. The awe-inspiring 13th-century **Mappa Mundi** (adult/child £4.50/3.50; 🕐 10am-4.15pm Mon-Sat & 11am-3.15pm Sun May-Sep, 11am-3.15pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) is a large calfskin vellum map intricately painted with the vivid (to modern eyes, wacky) world vision of the era's scholars and an enthralling pictorial encyclopedia of the times. It is the largest and best-preserved example of this type of cartography anywhere, but more than that it's a bewitching journey through the world as then envisioned, peopled by strange beings with eyes in their chest, roamed by basilisks and mythological monsters. Navigate your way through the barely recognisable mash of continents and you can even find Hereford itself.

The same wing contains the world's largest surviving **chained library**, hooked to its shelves by a cascade of long thin shackles. The unique collection of rare books and manuscripts includes a 1217 copy of the revised Magna Carta and the 8th-century *Hereford Gospels*, although the gospels' fragility means they aren't always on display.

The cathedral comes alive with evensong at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday and 3.30pm on Sunday, and every three years in August it holds the famous **Three Choirs Festival** (www.3choirs.org) shared with Gloucester and Worcester Cathedrals.

OTHER SIGHTS

Stranded alone amid a sea of bustling shops, the **Old House** (☎ 260694; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) is a wonderfully creaky black-and-white, three-storey wooden house, built in 1621, panelled and furnished in exquisitely carved wood.

The quirky collection at **Hereford Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 260692; Broad St; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) includes everything from 19th-century witches' curses to a two-headed calf. There are hands-on antiquities boxes and dressing-up gear to keep kids engaged.

Don't forget to claim your free samples in the **Cider Museum & King Offa Distillery** (☎ 354207; www.cidermuseum.co.uk; Pomona Pl; adult/child £3/2; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), which explores cider-making history. Look for the fine costrels (mini barrels) and horn mugs used by agricultural workers to carry and quaff their wages, which were partially paid in cider.

Sleeping

Charades (☎ 269444; www.charadeshereford.co.uk; 34 Southbank Rd; s/d £45/65; P ⊠) This fine old Georgian gentleman's residence built around 1860 has five light, cosy rooms with slightly frumpy old-fashioned décor. The house itself has character in spades – look for the suspiciously familiar dolls house and old service bells in the hall. It's handy for the bus station, but a 1km walk from the cathedral.

Castle House (☎ 356321; www.castlehse.co.uk; Castle St; s £120, d £210-258; P ⊠ ♿) This multi-award-winning and oh-so-refined Georgian town house, once the bishop's residence, is Hereford's best boutique hotel. Rooms have rich fabrics, classic décor with a modern twist, there's a lovely garden and riverside seating, as well as a seriously sophisticated restaurant with an innovative chef.

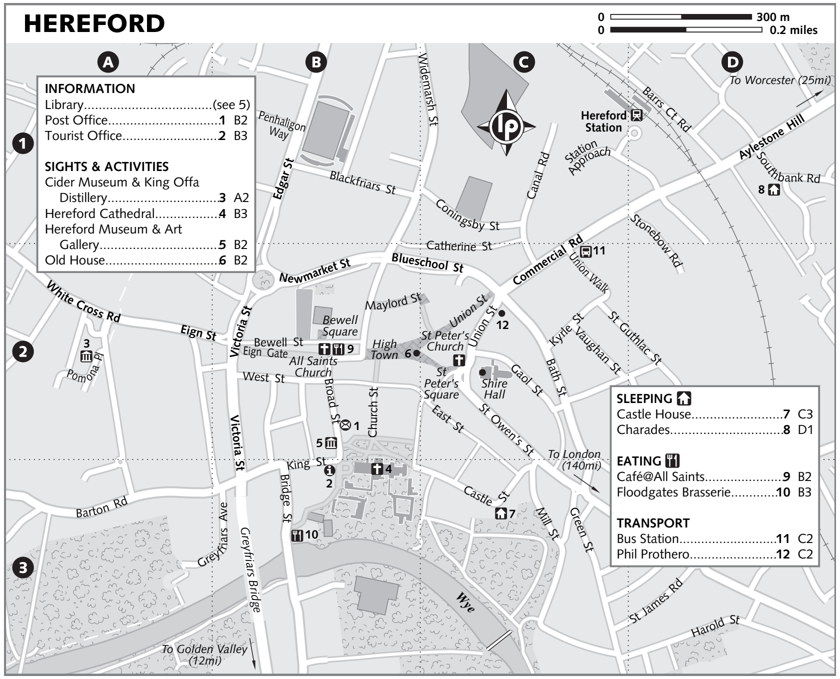
Eating

Café@All Saints (☎ 370414; www.cafeatallsaints.co.uk; High St; mains £4.75-6; 🕑 lunch) Trade nods with the clergy and sit up among lofty stone arches as you sip Fairtrade coffee or wolf down superbly wholesome (mostly vegetarian) lunches in this natty two-level café at the rear of a working church. You can even enjoy a glass of wine – just remember, God's watching.

Floodgates Brasserie (☎ 349000; Left Bank Centre, Bridge St; mains £10-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This sleek but ever-so-slightly soulless modern restaurant bags a privileged spot overlooking the river, complete with terrace; and if the sun's not shining the interior does a fair imitation, with vivid colours, polished steel and sunburst motifs.

Getting There & Around

Hire bikes at **Phil Prothero** (☎ 359478; Bastion Mews) for £12 per day.


HEREFORD
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Penhaligon Way
Edgar St
Blackfriars St
Coningsby St
Canal Rd
Station Approach
Barrs Ct Rd
Aylestone Hill
Southbank Rd
Stonebow Rd
Catherine St
Commercial Rd
Union Walk
Newmarket St
Blueschool St
Maylord St
Union St
White Cross Rd
Eign St
Victoria St
Bewell St
Bewell Square
Eign Gate
All Saints Church
High Town
St Peter's Church
St Peter's Square
Shire Hall
Kyle St
Vaughan St
St Guthlac St
Bath St
Gaol St
West St
Broad St
Church St
East St
St Owen's St
Pomona Pl
King St
To London (140mi)
Castle St
Mill St
Green St
Barton Rd
Bridge St
Greyfriars Ave
Greyfriars Bridge
Wye
St James Rd
Harold St
To Golden Valley (12mi)

There are hourly trains to London Paddington (£35, 3¼ hours) via Worcester (£8.40, 45 minutes); and to Birmingham (£11.80, 1½ hours). National Express goes to London (£18.60, 4¼ hours, three daily), Heathrow (£18.60, 3¼ hours, three daily), Gloucester (£5, 1¼ hours, three daily) and Ross-on-Wye (30 minutes, two daily) or Ledbury (25 minutes, two daily).

From the bus station, bus 420 runs every two hours to Worcester (1¼ hours). Bus 38 runs hourly to Ross-on-Wye (40 minutes, six on Sunday), and 476 goes hourly to Ledbury (30 minutes, five on Sunday) – both from the bus station on Commercial Rd.

AROUND HEREFORD

Kilpeck Church

A passionate couple, Disney-esque animals and a famous spread-legged *sheila-na-gig* (Celtic fertility figure) are just some of the extraordinary 12th-century carvings that ring this enchanting gem of a church, buried deep in the Herefordshire countryside in the tiny hamlet of Kilpeck. Astonishingly, the church remains practically unchanged since the 12th century and is well worth the 1-mile trip south of the main A465 road that comes from Hereford. Kilpeck is 9 miles south of Hereford, off the A465.

ROSS-ON-WYE

☎ 01989 / pop 10,085

Snoozy little Ross-on-Wye, which perches prettily on a red sandstone bluff over a kink in the River Wye, is a placid place to rest before or after exertions in the beautiful countryside that surrounds it. The town sparks to life in mid-August, when the **International Festival** brings fireworks, raft races, music and street theatre.

The salmon-pink 17th-century Market House sits atop its weathered sandstone columns in the Market Place. It still shelters the small market in a motherly fashion. It contains a **Heritage Centre** (☎ 260675; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) with local history displays. The **tourist office** (☎ 562768; tic-ross@herefordshire.gov.uk; Edde Cross St; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has information on activities and walks.

Sleeping & Eating

Linden House (☎ 565373; www.lindenguesthouse.com; 14 Church St; s/d without bathroom £32/58, with bathroom £45/65; P ⊠) Window boxes splash colour across this handsome 17th-century town house B&B. The beautifully furnished rooms are equally vivid, painted with cute stencilling and some sporting exposed beams and brass beds. It's run by a trained hypnotherapist who'll happily offer her services for a good night's sleep.

WORTH THE TRIP

Ford Abbey (☎ 01568-760700; www.fordabbey.co.uk; Pudleston; r £125-180; P ⊠ 🍽 ♿) Character and history in spades, but with just as strong a suit in luxury, this stunning half-timbered medieval abbey has been beautifully converted into an upper-crust retreat. Set amid extensive wooded and waterside gardens, the hotel seamlessly blends antiques with contemporary style. The spacious rooms are thickly beamed, graced by antique furniture and four-poster beds, while the restaurant serves up exquisite installations of food sculpture, much of it hailing from the hotel's own farm. Pudleston is about 10 miles north of Hereford.

Nature's Choice (☎ 763454; www.natures-choice.biz; 17 Broad St; mains £4.50-6; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Wed, 10am-5pm & 6.15-9pm Thu-Sat) This bright little organic café in a Regency-style building has wholesome home-baked and light meals for carnivore, vegetarian and vegan alike. It also offers ecofriendly B&B (singles/doubles £42/60), with cute rooms in pastel shades; breakfast costs extra but it's worth it.

The closest hostel is 6 miles south at Welsh Bicknor (see p392).

Getting There & Around

Buses 38 and 33 run hourly Monday to Saturday to and from Hereford and Gloucester respectively (40 minutes each way).

You can hire bikes from **Revolutions** (☎ 562 639; 48 Broad St; per day from £10).

AROUND ROSS-ON-WYE

Goodrich

Seeming to sprout organically from its craggy bedrock, **Goodrich Castle** (EH; ☎ 01600-890538; adult/child £4.50/2.30; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Feb) is an exceptionally complete medieval castle, topped by a superb 12th-century keep that rewards the trek up tight winding staircases with spectacular views. Don't miss clambering around the ramparts or sticking your head into 'Roaring Meg', the squat mortar cannon that breached these mighty walls during the Civil War.

Welsh Bicknor YHA (☎ 0870 770 6086; welshbicknor@yha.org.uk; dm £13.95; 🕒 Apr-Oct; 🅿 ⊠) is well worth the steep 1.5-mile ascent to reach it from Goodrich village. This former Victorian rectory enjoys glorious views and languishes amid 10 hectares of lovely riverside grounds. The Wye Valley Walk passes the hostel.

Goodrich is 5 miles south of Ross off the A40. Bus 34 stops here every two hours on its way between Ross (15 minutes) and Monmouth (20 minutes).

Symonds Yat

☎ 01600

A remote nook beautifully situated beside the River Wye, Symonds Yat is well worth a visit for water-babies, bird enthusiasts and those fond of a relaxed riverside pint. An ancient hand-hauled ferry (adult/child 80/40p) joins the two separate hill-hugging villages on either bank, usually with a few ducks stowing away in the back. There's an abrupt change of mood in upper Symonds Yat West, which hosts a big, sore-thumb fairground jingling to the sound of pocket change, slot-machines and carousels.

ACTIVITIES

This is prime canoeing and rock-climbing territory and there's good hiking in the nearby Forest of Dean. The **Wyedean Canoe Centre** (☎ 01594-833238; www.wyedean.co.uk) hires out canoes/kayaks from £20/16 for a half-day, £10 for an hour, and also organises multiday kayaking trips, white-water trips, caving and climbing. Note that the river has a strong current and is not suitable for swimming.

From Symonds Yat East, it's a steep but easy walk – at least on a dry day – up 504m to the crown of the region, **Symonds Yat Rock**, which provides tremendous views of the river and valley. You can catch a rare glimpse of the world's fastest creature doing aerial acrobatics here, as peregrine falcons nest in the cliffs opposite.

If that all sounds like too much hard work, **Kingfisher Cruises** (☎ 891063; adult/child £5/3) runs sedate 35-minute gorge cruises from beside the ferry.

SLEEPING & EATING

Old Court Hotel (☎ 890367; www.oldcourthotel.co.uk; Symonds Yat West; s £60, d £80-100; 🅿 ⊠ ♿) This grand 16th-century manor house will give history buffs a kick while also catering to comfort lovers. It's set in lovely gardens, complete with heated pool, and has character-filled rooms with exposed beams and frilly country-cottage décor. Children over 12 are welcome. Old Court is on the northern entrance to Symonds Yat West, across the river and roughly a mile's walk from the ferry.

Garth Cottage (☎ 890364; garthcot@yateast.fsnet.co.uk; Symonds Yat East; d £70; 🕒 Apr-Oct; 🅿 ⊠) The pick of accommodation on the east side, this friendly family-run B&B sits demurely by the riverside near the ferry crossing, and is spotlessly maintained. Breakfast is served in the conservatory or on the terrace; both overlook the water.

Saracen's Head (☎ 890435; www.saracensheadinn.co.uk; Symonds Yat East; mains £5-15; 🅿 ⊠) This black-and-white traditional inn is Symonds Yat's principal focal point, next to the ferry crossing. It has some river-view rooms (singles/doubles from £45/64) sporting pine furniture, and two luxury suites in the boathouse. It's a popular spot to tuck into bar food and restaurant fare while waiting for the moment when the ferryman topples into the river.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 34 can drop you on the main road 1.5 miles from the village. Bikes are available for hire from the Royal Hotel (Symonds Yat East) for £13 per day.

LEDBURY

☎ 01531 / pop 8491

This atmospheric little town is a favourite for day-trippers on account of its dense core of crooked black-and-white streets, which zero in on a delightfully leggy gingerbread-style market house.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 636147; tic-ledbury@herefordshire.gov.uk; 3 The Homend; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has details about a lovely 17-mile cycle route called the 'Ledbury Loop' (50p). To get online visit part ice-cream parlour, part internet café **Ice Bytes** (☎ 634700; 38 The Homend; per 15min £1).

Sights

Ledbury's showpiece is the gorgeous black-and-white **Market House**, a 17th-century, timber-framed structure precariously balanced atop 16 narrow wooden posts supposedly gleaned from the defeated Spanish Armada. From here, wander up the narrow cobbled **Church Lane**, crowded with tilted timber-framed buildings, including the **Painted Room** (🕒 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri Easter-Sep), with jigsaw puzzle 16th-century floral frescoes.

Here too are several small museums, including **Butcher's Row House** (☎ 632942; Church Lane; admission free; 🕒 11am-5pm Easter-Sep), a pocket-sized folk museum stuffed with curios from 19th-century school clothing to an 18th-century communal 'boot' bath that used to be carted from door to door for the poor to scrub in. The **Heritage Centre** (☎ 260692; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Easter-Oct) sits in another half-timbered treasure opposite and has more displays on the town.

At the top of the lane lies the 12th-century church of **St Michael & All Angels**, with a splendid 18th-century spire and tower separate from the church.

Sleeping & Eating

Budget travellers may struggle to find accommodation in Ledbury.

Talbot Hotel (☎ 632963; www.visitledbury.co.uk/talbot; New St; s/d £38.50/63.50; 🅿) A black-and-white late-16th-century coaching inn with a lively little bar and dark oak-panelled restaurant (mains £8 to £15) complete with painstakingly carved overmantle and musket-ball holes, the Talbot also has a handful of simple but quaint floral rooms in what used to be the hay loft. Breakfast costs extra.

Verzons Country Inn (☎ 670381; www.theverzon.co.uk; A438, Trumpet; s £75, d £98-130; 🅿 ⊠ 💻) The ultimate country-chic retreat, 2 miles west of Ledbury, this Georgian farmhouse has undergone a debonair makeover without sacrificing its rustic charm. Its 10 rooms are luxuriously appointed in tactile tweeds, seagrass and leather, and the brasserie's classic menu ranges from beer-battered cod to delicious duck (mains £10 to £17).

Feathers Hotel (☎ 635266; www.feathers-ledbury.co.uk; High St; s/d from £79.50/110; 🅿 ⊠ ♿) The oldest part of this black-and-white Tudor building, which looms over the main road, has the kind of slanting floorboards, painted beams and rich colours that leave you in no doubt of its age. However, many of the modern rooms lack these charms.

Ceci Paolo (☎ 632976; www.cecipaolo.com; 21 High St; mains £6-7; 🕒 lunch) This irresistible food emporium hooks foodies from the moment they wander into its wonderful deli, wine and kitchen shop downstairs, then reels them in with its chic contemporary café above. Daily specials showcase the deli's produce, with everything from manchego cheese to exotic verjuice marinade.

Getting There & Around

There are roughly hourly trains to Hereford (15 minutes), less often to Great Malvern (11 minutes), Worcester (23 to 27 minutes) and Birmingham (£9.60, 1¼ hours).

Bus 476 runs to Hereford hourly (30 minutes, every two hours on Sunday); bus 132 runs hourly to Gloucester (one hour); and 675 to Great Malvern (30 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday).

You can hire mountain bikes at **Saddle Bound Cycles** (☎ 633433; 3 The Southend; per day £10).

AROUND LEDBURY

Eastnor Castle

Built more for fancy than fortification, the extravagant 19th-century medieval-revival folly of **Eastnor Castle** (☎ 01531-633160; www.eastnorcastle.com; adult/child £7/4, grounds only £3/1; 🕒 11am-5pm Sun & Bank Holidays Apr-Sep, plus Sun-Fri Jul & Aug) makes you half expect to see a fire-breathing dragon appear or a golden-haired princess lean over its walls. The opulent interior continues the romantic veneer, decorated in Gothic and Italianate features, tapestries and antiques. Even when the castle is closed, its maze, adventure playground and lakeside walks are worth a look. Its beautiful deer park is also stage to the **Big Chill** (☎ 020-7684 2020; www.bigchill.net; 🕒 Aug), when campers, musicians, performers and artists round off summer festival season in relaxed fashion.

The castle is just over 2 miles east of Ledbury on the A438. The Malvern Hills Hopper runs here from Upton-upon-Severn and Great Malvern on summer weekends and Bank Holidays.

SHROPSHIRE

Jewel in the Marches' crown, the charming county of Shropshire ripples with heather-tickled hills, beautiful moorland and gushing rivers. It's a large pastoral region whose sparse population prizes the good life filled with fine food, health, peace and quiet. The county capital of Shrewsbury is one of England's loveliest Tudor towns, and nestled nearby is the fascinating industrial-heritage site of

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Kick off your weekend with a night of loved-up escapism and fine food at the pleasantly potty **Hundred House Hotel** (p402). Next morning, nip over to **Ironbridge Gorge** (p397) for a stroll across the world's first iron bridge, then roll down to the beautiful **Long Mynd** (p401) to build up an afternoon appetite on its stunning walking trails. Hold onto your hunger pangs just long enough to put them to good use in the region's gourmet capital, **Ludlow** (p403), where **Hibiscus** (p405) and **Mr Underhill's** (p405) are just two of the superb restaurants to choose between. Sleep off your excesses in the stunning timber-framed **Feathers Hotel** (p404), then on Sunday morning head south for a quick tour through the picture-postcard **black-and-white villages** (p389). For a final fling, linger over an indulgent Sunday lunch at the **Stagg Inn** (p389) and book yourself a trip to the gym on Monday.

Ironbridge Gorge. Peppered with pretty villages, the beautiful southern Shropshire Hills undulate southwards and make wonderful walking territory. And at the county's base you'll find gourmet hub Ludlow, with its handsome castle and fanaticism for food.

Information

For online county information:

North Shropshire (www.northshropshire.co.uk)
Secret Shropshire (www.secretshropshire.org.uk)
Shropshire Tourism (www.shropshiretourism.info)
Virtual Shropshire (www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk)
Visit South Shropshire (www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk)

Getting Around

You can hop on handy rail services from Shrewsbury to Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow. The invaluable *Shropshire Bus & Train Map*, available free from tourist offices, shows public transport routes. **Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses** (www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk) also drops off walkers along popular hiking routes on weekends and Bank Holidays. Call **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) with any queries.

SHREWSBURY

☎ 01743 / pop 67,126

It takes just seconds to fall in love with the spaghetti-bowl tangle of medieval streets in the heart of Shropshire's most picturesque town. Time-worn Tudor buildings tilt their ponderous frames over mysterious passageways; dusky-red sandstone warms an ancient abbey and castle, and sweeping gardens run down to the River Severn.

Nestled in a horseshoe bend of the river, Shrewsbury was for many centuries a critical defensive point to help keep the Welsh in line. Then in medieval times the town grew fat on the wool trade. It is also the birthplace of Charles Darwin (1809–82), whose theory of evolution left the world reeling.

Orientation

Shrewsbury's near-island status helps preserve the Tudor and Jacobean streetscapes of its centre and protects it from unattractive urban sprawl. The train station is a five-minute walk northeast of the centre and is as far as you'll need to venture.

Information

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital (☎ 261000; Mytton Oak Rd)

Shrewsbury Library (☎ 255300; Castle Gates; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 9.30am-8pm Tue & Thu, 1-4pm Sun) Free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 281200; www.visitshrewsbury.com; Music Hall, The Square; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) Guided walking tours (adult/child £3.50/1.50, 1½ hours) leave the tourist office at 2.30pm from May to September and at 2.30pm Saturday only from November to April.

Sights

SHREWSBURY ABBEY

Most famous as a setting for monastic whodunits the *Chronicles of Brother Cadfael* by Ellis Peters, this lovely red-sandstone **abbey** (☎ 232723; www.shrewsburyabbey.com; Abbey Foregate; donation adult/child £2/1; ⏲ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-2.30pm Sun) is what remains of a large Benedictine monastery founded in 1083, its outbuildings mostly lost and its flanks unceremoniously chopped. It's graced by a mix of Norman, Early English and Victorian features and there's an exceptional 14th-century west window of heraldic glass. The abbey is renowned for its acoustics and a notice board gives information on recitals.

SHREWSBURY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

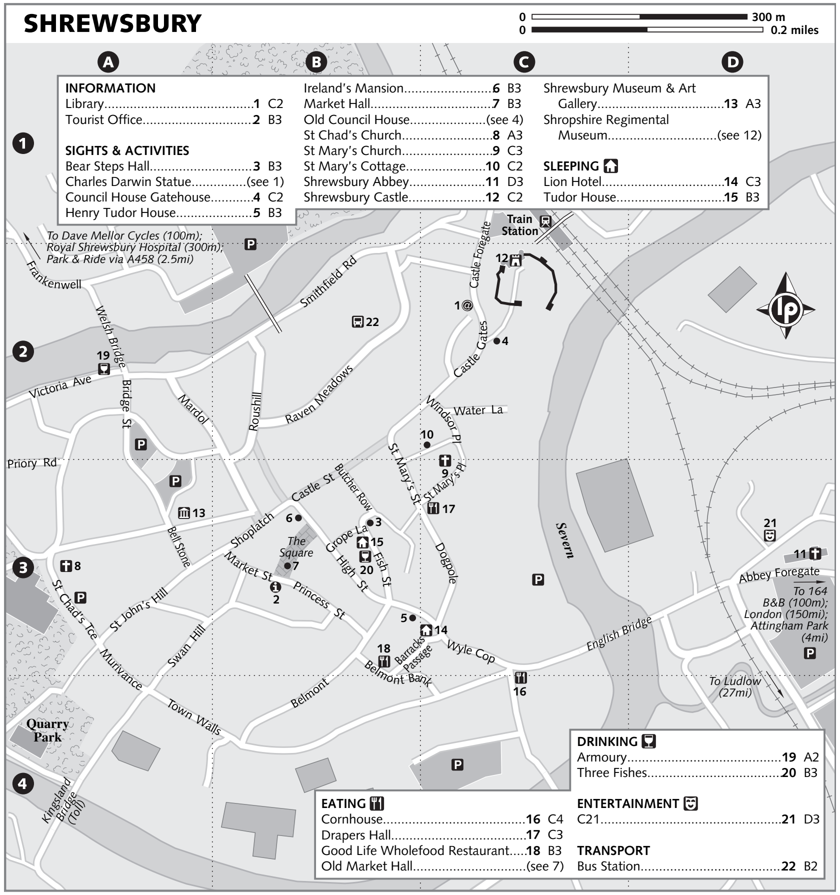
The stunning timber-framed Tudor merchant's mansion and warehouse in which **Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 361196; www.shrewsburymuseums.com; Barker St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-May, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) is housed are as much of an attraction as its exhibits, which range from Roman finds to Darwin's times.

Walking Tour

Start at the tourist office. The mellow-stone building balancing on chunky legs opposite you is Shrewsbury's 16th-century **Market Hall**, hub of the historic wool trade. A few pillars are still dented by rows of holes used to count how many fleeces were sold.

One of Shrewsbury's most magnificent black-and-white beauties, the lordly timber-framed **Ireland's Mansion** grabs attention to your left as you step up to High St. Turn right and cross over into the charmingly named and almost claustrophobically narrow **Grope Lane**, with overhanging storeys that seem to close in around you. You'll emerge into atmospheric **Fish Street**, and see some steps leading to the 14th-century **Bear Steps Hall** (⏲ 10am-4pm), now home to a small exhibition space. On the hall's other side is **Butcher Row**, home to more half-timbered lovelies.

Head another street north for a peek inside medieval **St Mary's Church** (St Mary's St; ⏲ 11am-4pm Fri-Sun May-Sep), which has one of the highest spires in England and the astonishingly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Windsor Pl
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Priory Rd
Castle St
Butcher Row
St Mary's St
St Mary's Pl
Shoplatch
The Square
Grope La
High St
Fish St
Dogpole
Severn
Bell Stone
Market St
Princess St
St Chad's Tce
St John's Hill
Swan Hill
Murivance
Barracks Passage
Belmont Bank
Wyle Cop
English Bridge
Abbey Foregate
To 164 B&B (100m); London (150mi); Attingham Park (4mi)
To Ludlow (27mi)
Belmont
Town Walls
Quarry Park
Kingsland Bridge (Toll)

vivid Jesse window of rare mid-14th-century glass.

Pass the tilted 17th-century **St Mary's Cottage** and turn left into Windsor Pl, before taking the second right into Castle St. You can't miss the entrance right to terracotta-coloured **Shrewsbury Castle**, which houses the stiff-upper-lip **Shropshire Regimental Museum** (☎ 358516; adult/child £2.50/1.25; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun-Mon May-Sep, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat Feb-Apr) and has wonderful views.

Back near the entrance is Jacobean-style **Council House Gatehouse**, dating from 1620, and **Old Council House**, where the Council of the Welsh Marches used to meet.

Opposite the castle is the rather ostentatious **library**, with a **statue** of Shrewsbury's most famous son, Charles Darwin. Returning to St Mary's St, follow it into Dogpole and turn right into Wyle Cop, Welsh for 'hilltop'. Henry VII stayed in the seriously overhanging **Henry Tudor House** before the Battle of Bosworth. At the bottom of Wyle Cop is the graceful 18th-century **English Bridge**, which takes you across to **Shrewsbury Abbey**.

Sleeping

164 (☎ 367750; www.164bedandbreakfast.co.uk; 164 Abbey Foregate; s/d £45/58, without bathroom £35/54; Ⓟ wi-fi) A breath of fresh air, this B&B eschews chintz and celebrates its lovely 16th-century timber frame, rough walls and lopsided floors with vivid colours, contemporary fabrics and a quirky mix of artwork. And as a cherry on the top, breakfast is served in bed.

Tudor House (☎ 351735; www.tudorhouseshrewsbury.com; 2 Fish St; s/d from £69/79; 🚭) For a more rose-tinted picture of the past, this gloriously creaky medieval building is festooned with floral window boxes and its handful of traditional oak-beamed rooms are turned out in high-shine fabrics, some with spindly metal-framed headboards entwined with flowers. Not all rooms have an en suite.

Lion Hotel (☎ 0870 609 6167; www.corushotels.com/thelion; Wyle Cop; s/d from £60/79, ste from £108; Ⓟ 🚭) A cowardly lion presides over the doorway of this grand old coaching inn, which has hosted many a luminary through its 400-year history. Although the three-score standard rooms have a bland style with faded leafy motifs your granny would pick, the suites are the real deal, with bags of character and oodles of antiques.

There are plenty more B&Bs huddled around Abbey Foregate.

Eating

Good Life Wholefood Restaurant (☎ 350455; Barracks Passage; mains £3.50-7; 🕐 lunch Mon-Sat) Run by a dietician and devotee of good honest vegetarian food, this cute little refuge off Wyle Cop is a great place for hearty and wholesome salads, hot bakes and delicious desserts. Takeaway is available.

Old Market Hall (☎ 281281; Market Sq; mains £5-7; 🕐 10am-late) Hobnob with the local arts brigade in this posh café-bar in the old drapers hall, underneath a stunning timbered roof; it's styled to combine city chic with cosy rustic touches. As well as speciality teas, soul-restoring coffees and wines, it serves up a range of sandwiches, wraps, and calorific pastries. It's based in a lively film and media centre.

Cornhouse (☎ 231991; 59a Wyle Cop; mains £8-14; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This classy but relaxed wine-bar and restaurant successfully mixes contemporary style with period features from its working corn-house days. Its consistently good British food is served up in the shadow of a superb cast-iron spiral staircase.

Drapers Hall (☎ 344679; St Mary's Pl; mains £12-17.50; 🕐 lunch & dinner) The atmosphere is thick with history in this well-fossilised 16th-century hall, fronted by an elegant Elizabethan façade. Dining is divided between dark oak-panelled rooms decked out in sumptuous fabrics and antique screens. The sophisticated Anglo-French menu and connoisseur's wine list are also well worthy of a special occasion.

Drinking

Armoury (☎ 340525; www.armoury-shrewsbury.co.uk; Victoria Ave) There's an irresistibly infectious bonhomie to this converted riverside warehouse. Towering bookshelves, old pictures and curios help straddle the divide between posh restaurant and informal pub, while a plethora of blackboard menus invite you to sample wines, guest ales and hearty British dishes (mains £8 to £14).

Three Fishes (☎ 344793; 4 Fish St) The quintessential small English alehouse, with a jolly owner, mellow regulars and hops hanging from the 15th-century beamed ceiling. No music here, just real ales on tap and the refreshing atmosphere of a pub that has long been sending smokers outside.

Entertainment

C21 (☎ 271821; 21 Abbey Foregate; admission after 10pm £3-5; 🕐 8.30pm-3am) A polished city-chic club for over-25s to indulge in late-night cocktails and dance-floor acrobatics. Also home to Shrewsbury's main lesbian and gay night on Monday.

Getting There & Around

BIKE

You can hire bikes at **Dave Mellor Cycles** (☎ 366662; www.thecycleshop.co.uk; 9 New St; bikes/tandems per day from £15/25).

BUS

National Express has two direct buses to London (£16.50, 4½ hours) and two more via Birmingham (£16.50, five hours). Bus 96 serves Ironbridge (30 minutes) every second hour Monday to Saturday. Bus 435 travels to Ludlow (1¼ hours) via Church Stretton (45 minutes) eight times daily and bus 553 heads to Bishop's Castle (one hour) 10 times daily.

TRAIN

There are no direct trains connecting Shrewsbury and London – you must change at Wolverhampton (£38.70, 2½ to three hours). There are twice-hourly trains to Ludlow (£7.70, 30 minutes).

Shrewsbury is a popular starting point for two scenic routes into Wales: one loop takes in Shrewsbury, northern Wales and Chester; the other, **Heart of Wales Line** (☎ 0870 9000 772; www.heart-of-wales.co.uk), runs southwest to Swansea (£20, 3¾ hours, four daily).

AROUND SHREWSBURY

Attingham Park

Shropshire's finest stately home is Palladian-style **Attingham Park** (NT; ☎ 01743-708123; house & grounds adult/child £6.50/3.25, grounds only £3.30/1.65; 🕐 house 1-5pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar–Oct, grounds 10am-dusk year-round), built in the late 18th century and reminiscent of many a corset-and-lace drama. Behind the high-and-mighty neoclassical façade is a picture gallery by John Nash, and two wings respectively decorated into staunch masculine and oh-so-pretty feminine Regency interiors. The landscaped grounds shelter a herd of deer and pleasant walks along the River Tern.

Attingham Park is 4 miles southeast of Shrewsbury at Atcham. Buses 81 and 96 (18 minutes) run six times Monday to Friday, less frequently on weekends.

Wroxeter Roman City

An engrossing tale of Roman Britain can be traced through the stubby foundations of Viroconium, at **Wroxeter** (EH; ☎ 01743-761330; adult/child £4/2; 🕐 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Feb). Geophysical work has revealed a Roman city as large as Pompeii underneath the lush surrounding farmland, though for now you'll have to content yourself with exploring the public baths and marketplace. Note the hastily filled-in outdoor swimming pool, optimistically built before the Romans realised their miscalculation of the northern English climes.

Wroxeter is 6 miles southeast of Shrewsbury, off the B4380. Bus 96 stops nearby, and runs six times Monday to Friday, less on weekends.

IRONBRIDGE GORGE

☎ 01952

It can be hard to fully grasp the world-rocking events that took place in this tranquil river gorge as you wind your way through its wooded slopes and sleepy villages. But the Industrial Revolution was dramatically kick-started here in the 18th century. Three generations of the pioneering Darby family set about transforming their industrial processes and in so doing irreversibly changed the world.

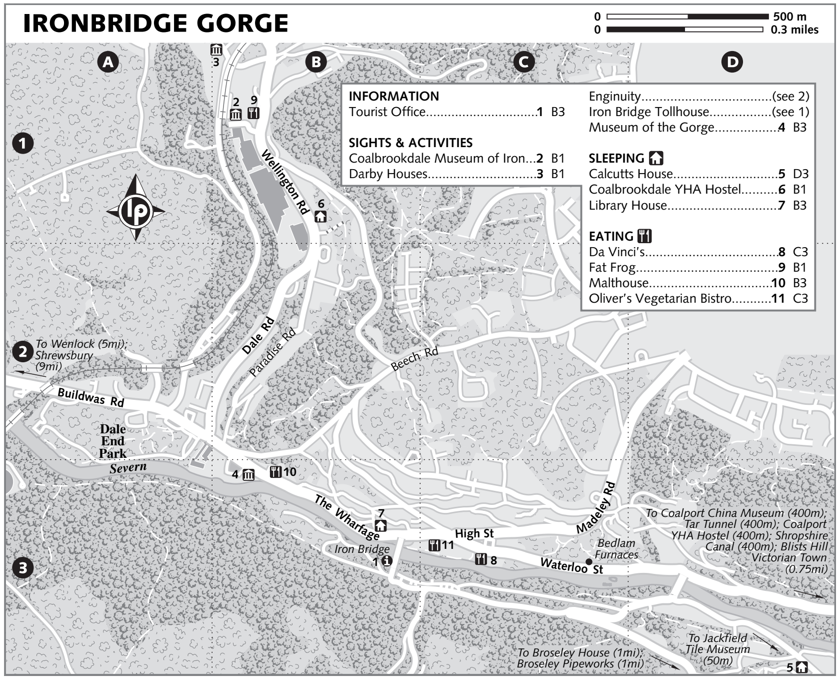
The story began quietly in 1709, when Abraham Darby determinedly set about restoring an old furnace to prove it was possible to smelt iron ore with coke. After much trial and error he was proved right, and his breakthrough paved the way for local factories to mass-produce the first iron wheels, rails and steam locomotives. Abraham Darby II's innovative forging process then enabled the production of single beams of iron, allowing Abraham Darby III to stun the world with the very first iron bridge, constructed here in 1779. The bridge remains the valley's showpiece and dominates the main village, which is a jumble of cottages sliding down the gorge's steep bank.

Now written into history books as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, Ironbridge is a World Heritage Site and the Marches' top attraction. Ten very different museums now tell the story in the very buildings where it all took place.

Orientation & Information

Driving or cycling can make life easier, as the museums are peppered throughout the long gorge. See p400 for public transport options.

The **tourist office** (☎ 884391; www.visitironbridge.co.uk; Tollhouse; 🕐 10am-5pm) is by the bridge.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Beech Rd
Buildwas Rd
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Severn
The Wharfage
Iron Bridge
High St
Waterloo St
Madeley Rd
Bedlam Furnaces
To Coalport China Museum (400m); Tar Tunnel (400m); Coalport YHA Hostel (400m); Shropshire Canal (400m); Blists Hill Victorian Town (0.75mi)
To Jackfield Tile Museum (50m)
To Broseley House (1mi); Broseley Pipeworks (1mi)

Sights & Activities

You can buy a passport ticket (adult/child £14/9.50) that allows year-round entry to all of the sites at any of the museums or the tourist office. The museums open from 10am to 5pm unless stated otherwise.

MUSEUM OF THE GORGE

A succinct overview of the site is on offer at the **Museum of the Gorge** (The Wharfage; adult/child £2.50/1.50), making it a good spot to start. Housed in a Gothic warehouse by the river, it's filled with touchscreens, fun exhibits and details of the horrific consequences of pollution and environmental hazards at the cutting edge of industry (Abraham I and III both died at 39). An absorbing video sets the museum in its historical context.

COALBROOKDALE MUSEUM OF IRON & DARBY HOUSES

Coalbrookdale is the gorge's key site, as it was here that trailblazing Abraham Darby first smelted iron ore with coke. You can even peer into the very furnace he used, which sits in a wacky sculpture garden beside the **Museum of Iron** (adult/child £6/4); the museum is in turn set in the site's sprawling iron foundry, where an army of men and boys once churned out heavy-duty iron equipment and later, ever more fancy ironwork castings. The excellent interactive exhibits chart the company's history and showcase some extraordinary creations.

The early industrial settlement that surrounds the site has also happily survived, with workers cottages, chapels, church and graveyard undisturbed. Just up the hill are the beautifully restored 18th-century **Darby Houses** (☎ 433522; adult/child £3.50/2; 🕙 Apr-Oct), which housed generations of the industrial big cheeses in gracious but modest Quaker comfort. Rosehill House is furnished with much original furniture and, next door, Dale House includes the wood-panelled office in which the third Abraham Darby pored over his bridge designs.

IRON BRIDGE & TOLLHOUSE

The gorge's defining image, this flamboyant arch was the world's first such iron bridge and a triumph of engineering that left contemporaries flabbergasted by its apparent flimsiness. It still impresses visitors more than 225 years on as a fitting symbol of the pioneering success of this remote Shropshire town and of its visionary creator Abraham Darby III's own technological prowess. The **tollhouse** (admission free; 🕙 10am-5pm) houses a small exhibition on the bridge's history.

BLISTS HILL VICTORIAN TOWN

To immerse yourself in 19th-century Britain, hear the pounding of steam hammers and the clip-clop of horse hooves, or knock a coconut off its stand, head to the vast open-air Victorian theme park, **Blists Hill** (☎ 433522; Legges Way, Madeley; adult/child £9/6; 🕙 10am-5pm). This ambitious project does a remarkably good job of reconstructing an entire village, encompassing everything from a working foundry to bank and sweet shop. Costumed staff explain displays, craftspeople demonstrate skills, and if it all gets too much you can grab yourself a stiff drink at the Victorian pub.

COALPORT CHINA MUSEUM & TAR TUNNEL

When ironmaking moved elsewhere, Coalport china slowed the region's decline and the restored works now house an absorbing **China Museum** (adult/child £5/3.50) tracing the region's glory days as a manufacturer of elaborate pottery and crockery. Craftspeople demonstrate china-making techniques and two enormous bottle kilns are guaranteed to awe even if the gaudily glazed chinaware leaves you cold.

A short ramble along the canal brings you to the 200-year-old **Tar Tunnel** (adult/child £1.50/1; 🕙 Apr-Sep), dug as a water-supply channel but halted abruptly when natural bitumen unexpectedly started trickling treaclelike from its walls. You can still don a hard hat and stoop in deep enough to see the black stuff ooze.

JACKFIELD TILE MUSEUM

A kaleidoscopic collection of Victorian tiles, faïence and ceramics can be found at the **Jackfield Tile Museum** (adult/child £5/3.50), displayed through a series of gas-lit period-style galleries reconstructing lustrous tiled interiors of everything from pubs to churches and tube stations to remarkably fancy toilets. Kids especially love the fairy-tale friezes for children's hospital wards.

BROSELEY PIPEWORKS

Tobacco-smoking was the height of gentlemanly chic in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and a vast range of clay pipes from short-stemmed pipsqueaks to arm-length 'church wardens' were produced in the **Broseley Pipeworks** (adult/child £3.50/2; 🕙 1-5pm mid-May–Sep), once Britain's most prolific pipe manufacturer. The factory finally closed in 1957, but has now reopened for visitors to explore its time-capsule contents, which are largely unchanged since the last worker turned out the lights. It's a mile-long walk to get here, signposted from the bridge.

ENGINUITY

Championing Ironbridge's spirit of brains before brawn, the fabulous interactive design and technology centre **Enginuity** (adult/child £5.50/4) invites you to move a steam engine with the flick of a wrist, X-ray everyday objects, power up a vacuum cleaner with self-generated electricity and basically dive headfirst into a vast range of hands-on, brains-on challenges, games and gadgets that explore design and engineering in modern life. If you have kids with you, allow at least two hours.

Sleeping

Coalbrookdale YHA (☎ 0870 770 5882; ironbridge@yha.org.uk; Paradise Rd, Coalbrookdale; dm £13.95; Ⓟ ⊠) The rather imposing former Literary & Scientific Institute, a grand blue-grey building from 1859 sitting high on the hillside behind sturdy iron gates, now houses a comfortable hostel within easy walking distance of the Museum of Iron. It has several en-suite family rooms.

Coalport YHA (☎ 0870 770 5882; ironbridge@yha.org.uk; High St, Coalport; dm £15.50; Ⓟ ⊠) This historic former china factory, a big bluff industrial-looking building mere paces from the China Museum and the canal, and close to pleasant countryside walks, now houses an 83-bed hostel. The plain, modern rooms betray little of their long history, however.

Calcutts House (☎ 882631; www.calcuttshouse.co.uk; Calcutts Rd; s/d/f from £40/60/85; Ⓟ ⊠) This former ironmaster's pad built in the 18th century is tucked away a few strides from the Jackfield Tile Museum. Its traditionally decorated rooms have bags of character, quality furniture and furnishings and are each named after a celebrated former owner of or visitor to the house. It's also family friendly, as testified by a trampoline and goalposts in the garden.

Library House (☎ 432299; www.libraryhouse.com; 11 Severn Bank; s/d £55/70; Ⓟ wi-fi) A lovingly restored Georgian library building hugged by vines, nudged by a beautiful garden and elegantly decorated with deep leather sofas, light colours and plentiful frills. There are extra home comforts and welcoming hosts. It's set back from the road on a tiny curving street close to the iron bridge.

Eating

Malthouse (☎ 433712; www.themalthouseironbridge.com; The Wharfage; mains £9-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Doubly popular for its buzzing atmosphere and huge portions, this former malting house turned vibrant gastropub and jazz bar sits by the riverfront and serves some seriously good traditional dishes. The terrace is a big plus in summer. Stylish contemporary rooms (£63) are also available.

Fat Frog (☎ 432240; www.fat-frog.co.uk; Coalbrookdale; mains £10-17; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) A quirky French bar-bistro cluttered with toy frogs and showbiz memorabilia, with a rustic candle-lit basement and playing nostalgic music from the ebullient Gallic proprietor's prime. The food is excellent, and as you'd expect, there's great wine list with plenty of half-bottles.

Other spots to consider:

Oliver's Vegetarian Bistro (☎ 433086; 33 High St; mains £8.95; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Stylish meat-free food beside the bridge.

Da Vinci's (☎ 432250; 26 High St; mains £11-18; 🕒 dinner Tue-Sat) Gourmet Italian food served in a classy wood-panelled dining room.

Getting There & Away

The nearest train station is 5 miles away at Telford. Bus 96 runs every two hours (Monday to Saturday) between Shrewsbury (40 minutes) and Telford (15 to 20 minutes) via Ironbridge, stopping near the Museum of the Gorge. Bus 39 runs from Much Wenlock (30 minutes, three daily).

Getting Around

The Gorge Connect bus connects nine of the museums every half-hour on weekends and Bank Holidays only. It costs 50p per journey.

Midweek your only options are to walk or hire a bike from **Broseley House** (☎ 882043; www.broseleyhouse.co.uk; 1 The Square, Broseley; per day £10), a mile and a half south of the bridge; booking is advised. You may also like to look into **Tandem Experience** (☎ 0845 60 66 456; www.tandeming.co.uk; tandem per day £50), based at the Coalport YHA; the price includes tuition for tandem riding.

MUCH WENLOCK

☎ 01952 / pop 1959

A spider's web of narrow streets flanked by Tudor, Jacobean and Georgian buildings, an arresting timbered guildhall and the enchanting remains of a 12th-century priory make this little town a big hit with visitors. It can also justifiably claim to have jump-started the modern Olympics (see the boxed text, opposite).

The **tourist office** (☎ 727679; muchwenlock.tourism@shropshire-cc.gov.uk; The Square; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, plus Sun Jun-Aug) shares a 19th-century building and opening hours with the local **museum** (admission free).

Sights & Activities

The tourist office provides a 10p map to the town's sights of historical interest, as well as copies of *The Olympian Trail*, a pleasant 1.5-mile walking tour of the town exploring the link between the village and the modern Olympics.

Or you can skip straight to the town's highlight, the evocative 12th-century ruins of **Wenlock Priory** (EH; ☎ 727466; adult/child £3.30/1.70; 🕒 10am-5pm May-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr & Sep-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Feb), surrounded by neatly snipped grounds studded with kooky topiaries of squirrels and teddy bears. The remains include part of a finely decorated chapterhouse and an unusual carved lavabo. In July and August the ruins make a stunning backdrop for Shakespearean plays.

Sleeping & Eating

The closest hostel is Wilderhope Manor YHA (see opposite).

Talbot Inn (☎ 727077; www.the-talbot-inn.com; High St; s/d £47.50/70; P ☒) Through a flower-dappled archway, this wonderfully atmospheric medieval inn with colossal beams, cavernous fireplaces and good home-style fare (mains £10 to £15) also has six rooms in a converted 18th-century malthouse, with whitewashed walls, exposed beams and wood furniture.

Raven Hotel (☎ 727251; www.ravenhotel.com; Barrow St; s/d £75/110; P ☒) Much Wenlock's finest, this 17th-century coaching inn and converted stables has thick oak beams, open fires and rich country-chic styling throughout. The excellent restaurant overlooks a flowery courtyard and serves up classic British and Mediterranean fare (bar food £7 to £13, two-course meal £20.50).

GRANDDADDY OF THE MODERN OLYMPICS

All eyes will be on London when the Olympic Games arrive in 2012, but they will not be the only Olympics taking place in Britain at that time. The altogether more modest annual games at tiny Much Wenlock were instrumental in the rebirth of their big fat Greek brother.

Local doctor and sports enthusiast William Penny Brookes fused his knowledge of the ancient Olympics and rural British pastimes to launch the Much Wenlock Olympic Games in 1850. Begun as a distraction for the beer-swilling local youth, the games soon pricked the interest of Baron Pierre Coubertin, who visited Much Wenlock in 1890 to see them for himself.

He and Brookes became firm friends, with the shared dream of reviving the ancient Olympics. Coubertin went on to launch the modern Olympics in Athens in 1896; the games featured many of the events he had seen in Much Wenlock (although wheelbarrow racing and chasing a greased pig around town never really caught on). Brookes was invited to the event but he died, aged 86, before the games opened.

The good doctor never really got his share of the Olympic limelight until almost a century later, when International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch visited his grave to 'pay tribute and homage to Dr Brookes, who really was the founder of the Modern Olympic Games'.

The Much Wenlock Olympics are still held every July, with events that range from the triathlon to bowls. You can find details at www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk.

Getting There & Away

Bus 436 runs from Shrewsbury (35 minutes) to Bridgnorth (20 minutes) hourly (five on Sunday).

AROUND MUCH WENLOCK

Wenlock Edge

This spectacular limestone escarpment swells up like an immense petrified wave, its ancient oceanic rock rich in fossils and its flanks frothy with woodland. It stretches for 15 miles from Much Wenlock to Craven Arms and makes for wonderful walking and dramatic views. The National Trust (NT) owns much of the ridge, and there are many waymarked trails starting from car parks dotted along the B4371. There are no helpful buses along this route.

For a bite, a beer or a bed en route, the snug 17th-century **Wenlock Edge Inn** (☎ 01746-785678; B4371, Hilltop; s/d £50/70; P) is a firm favourite with hikers and locals alike. It's a down-to-earth place with walls of Wenlock stone, low beams and a handsome Inglenook fireplace and dishes up hearty sustenance for the road ahead (mains £7 to £9). It also has three rustic rooms available, and showers fed by the well. The pub is about 4.5 miles southwest of Much Wenlock on the B4371.

For top-value budget accommodation, ramble out to the remote **Wilderhope Manor YHA** (☎ 0870 770 6090; wilderhope@yha.org.uk; Longville-in-the-Dale; dm £13.95; 🕒 Fri-Sat & school holidays; P ☒), a gloriously atmospheric gabled Elizabethan manor, with oak spiral staircases, wood-panelled walls and an impressive dining hall. The hostel is set deep in lush countryside and adjoins a picturesque if pongy farmyard.

You can catch buses from Ludlow and Bridgnorth to Shipton, a half-mile walk from Wilderhope.

CHURCH STRETTON & AROUND

☎ 01694 / pop 3841

Cradled in a deep valley between the beautiful Long Mynd and the Caradoc Hills, this scenic if restrained little town is the ideal base from which to venture into the glorious surroundings. It also shelters some interesting old buildings, including a 12th-century Norman church most famous for its weather-beaten but still undauntedly exhibitionist *sheila-na-gig* (quasi-erotic stone carving) over its north door.

The **tourist office** (☎ 723133; www.churchstretton.co.uk; Church St; 🕒 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat), adjoining the library, has abundant walking information as well as free internet access.

Walking

Shropshire's most famous mountain, the glorious hogs-back hill of **Long Mynd** heaves its bulk up above Church Stretton. This is one of the best walking areas in the Marches, dubbed 'Little Switzerland' by the Victorians, who flocked here for its healthy climes and spring waters. The entire area is webbed by walking trails with memorable views.

WORTH THE TRIP

Hundred House Hotel (☎ 01952-730353; www.hundredhouse.co.uk; A442, Norton; s/d £85/99; P ☒) For escapism at its barmiest and best, make a beeline to this wildly romantic and unabashedly wacky hotel. This historic place is crammed with flamboyant décor, heart motifs and antique beds, and seven out of 10 rooms sport suggestive velvet-covered swings entwined with ribbons. Shampoo comes in carafes and pillows are sprinkled with lavender water. The quirky herb gardens are another adventure and include a trail to the teddy bears picnic. The owners devote just as much passion to their food; the excellent menu (mains £13 to £19) uses local produce to perfection. Hundred House is 6 miles southeast of Ironbridge Gorge.

You could start with the **Carding Mill Valley Trail**, which starts just outside Church Stretton and leads up to the 517m summit of the Long Mynd. This trail can get very busy at weekends and in summer, so you might prefer to pick your own peak or cross the A49 and climb towards the 459m summit of Caer Caradoc.

You can drive part of the way up the Carding Mill Valley, although the NT would rather you took the **Long Mynd Shuttle bus** (🕑 weekends & Bank Holidays only Apr-Oct) from Beaumont Rd or the station.

Sleeping

Bridges Long Mynd YHA (☎ 01588-650656; www.yha.org.uk; Ratlinghope; dm £10.95; P ☒) Built as an 18th-century village school, this is now one of the country's longest-running YHA hostels. Tucked deep in the Shropshire Hills, on the doorstep of the Shropshire Way and walks to Long Mynd and Stiperstones, it has basic but comfortable dorms. Boulton's bus 551 comes here from Shrewsbury on Tuesday only. On weekends from April to October the Long Mynd shuttle runs hourly to Church Stretton.

Brookfields (☎ 722314; paulangie@brookfields51.fsnet.co.uk; Watling St North; s/d/f from £30/59/65; P ☒) A short stroll east across the A49 from town, this substantial red-brick Edwardian family home retains much of its period character, has pristine and thoughtfully appointed en-suite rooms in muted colours and a terrific breakfast served companionably with other guests around a large dining table.

our pick **Jinlye Guest House** (☎ 723243; www.jinlye.co.uk; Castle Hill, All Stretton; s/d £50/70; P ☒ ♿) The Long Mynd is your back garden and sheep your neighbours at this beautifully restored crofter's cottage on the hilltop, and graced by old beams, log fires and leaded windows. Bedrooms are bright and elegantly furnished with antiques and butter-wouldn't-melt floral fabrics. Expect a good old-fashioned welcome.

Eating

Berry's Coffee House (☎ 724452; www.berryscoffeehouse.co.uk; 17 High St; meals £5.50-7; 🕑 lunch Wed-Sat) A delightfully gossipy café in an 18th-century building with alfresco courtyard just off the main street. Berry's cherishes its organic free-range and Fairtrade ethos and proffers wholesome locally sourced dishes, though the halo slips when confronted with the scandalous desserts.

Studio (☎ 722672; 59 High St; meals £14-16.50; 🕑 dinner only Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) A converted artist's studio, still littered with interesting works, sets the scene for this, the town's best and most intimate restaurant. The award-winning menu jumps confidently between modern British and traditional French food, and uses plenty of local game and fish.

Getting There & Around

There are hourly trains to Shrewsbury (20 minutes) and bus 435, which runs between Shrewsbury (45 minutes) and Ludlow (40 minutes) six times daily, stops here.

You can hire 24-speed mountain bikes with front or full suspension and cheaper, simpler bikes from **Shropshire Hills Bike Hire** (☎ 723302; 6 Castle Hill, All Stretton; bikes per day £10-17.50).

BISHOP'S CASTLE

☎ 01588 / pop 1630

Stress seems an alien concept in this languorous little border town, home to an enchanting medley of renowned breweries, contorted half-timbered buildings, secondhand bookshops and eclectic boutiques that endear it to day-trippers. At the top of High St sits the adorable Georgian **town hall** and delightfully crooked 16th-century **House on Crutches** (☎ 630007; admission free; 🕑 1-5pm Sat & Sun), which also houses the town **museum**.

The pleasingly potty **Old Time** (☎ 638467; www.bishopscastle.co.uk; 29 High St; 🕑 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) offers limited tourist information.

Walking

Walk along the **Shropshire Way**, which runs through the town and joins up with Offa's Dyke Path to the south; the Kerry Ridgeway to the south; or head north and risk the forbidding ridges of the **Stiperstones**, where Satan is said to hold court.

Sleeping & Eating

Castle Hotel (☎ 638403; www.thecastlehotelbishopscastle.co.uk; The Square; s/d £40/70; P ☒) Haughtily perched in an elevated square, this handsome 18th-century coaching inn has lovely terraced gardens and six relaxing beamed rooms furnished with antiques and strait-laced floral designs. Room eight is especially atmospheric. The oak-panelled restaurant (mains £6 to £10) dishes up classic British food.

Poppy House (☎ 638443; www.poppyhouse.co.uk; 20 Market Sq; s/d £45/70) Sweetly stylish rooms with an air of simple elegance, adorned by luxurious red textiles, timber-framed walls and sloping floors, as well as a complimentary breakfast-in-bed service win this B&B much praise. Poppy motifs colour the reliable restaurant (mains £5 to £9; open 10am to 5pm and 6.30pm to 11pm) downstairs.

Drinking

Three Tuns (☎ 638797; Salop St) One of Shropshire's most famous alehouses is a surprisingly ordinary place but for the fact that it sits next door to a Victorian four-storey tower brewery, close enough to smell the roasting malt. Though they're no longer run by the same folk, you can still sample the brewery's best at the Three Tuns bar.

Six Bells Inn (☎ 630144; Church St) This historic 17th-century coaching inn buzzes with loyal locals and serves ales from its adjoining brewery on tap. The pub also has a reputation for good ol' English comfort food (mains £7.50 to £13 open lunch and dinner Tuesday to Saturday and lunch Sunday) like Big Nev's bangers made with local ale and Shropshire fidget pie.

Getting There & Away

Buses 552 and 748 run to and from Shrewsbury (one hour) seven times daily.

LUDLOW

☎ 01584 / pop 9548

All those bracing walks in the Shropshire Hills may come to naught once you reach the gourmet capital of England's northwest, Ludlow. This beautiful town has the twin attractions of being a crucible of culinary excellence, with more Michelin stars per head than anywhere but Paris, and boasting a rich historical core that fans out from its fine Norman castle. Its lovely muddle of narrow streets is flanked by half-timbered Jacobean and elegant Georgian buildings, many hosting independent butchers, bakers, grocers and cheesemongers all vying to whet your appetite for dinner. Our advice: book ahead and punch a few extra holes in your belt.

Ludlow's helpful **tourist office** (☎ 875053; www.ludlow.org.uk; Castle St; 🕑 10am-5pm) is in the 19th-century assembly rooms, now a lively arts and community centre. There's also a small back-to-front **museum** (☎ 813666; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Easter-Oct) on the town and surrounding area here.

Internet can be tracked down at the **library** (☎ 813600; 7/9 Parkway; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 9.30am-7.30pm Fri) and clothes can be washed, dried and pressed at **Ludlow Laundry** (Tower St; per bag £4.80; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat).

Sights & Activities

With seductive delicatessens and distracting antique dealers around every corner, the best way to explore Ludlow is to simply surrender to getting pleasurably lost on foot.

The town's crowning jewel is its splendid **castle** (☎ 873355; www.ludlowcastle.com; Castle Sq; adult/child/senior & student £4/2/3.50; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Dec, Feb & Mar, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun only Jan), which snags an ideal defensive location atop a cliff above the river's elbow. One of a line of fortifications built along the Marches to ward off the marauding Welsh, it is now a great castle for hide-and-seek, with myriad nooks, ruined rooms and mysterious stairwells. The sturdy Norman keep was built around 1090 and has wonderful views. The castle was transformed into a 14th-century palace by the notorious Roger Mortimer, who was instrumental in the grisly death of Edward II. The round chapel in the inner bailey was built in 1120 and is one of few surviving.

The waymarked 30-mile **Mortimer Trail** to Kington starts just outside the castle entrance. The tourist office can provide a free leaflet on en route services, or a more thorough booklet for £1.50. Also see www.mortimercountry.co.uk.

Some delightfully cheeky medieval misericords lurk in the choir of **Church of St Laurence** (☎ 872073; www.stlaurences.org.uk; King St; requested donation £2; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct-Mar), one of the biggest parish churches in Britain. These painstakingly carved 'mercy seats' show scenes of domestic 15th-century life both pious and profane, including a beer-swilling chap raiding his barrel.

Guided walks (£2) run from April to October, leaving the Cannon in Castle Sq at 2.30pm on Saturday and Sunday. You can also take the **ghost walk** (www.shropshireghostwalks.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/2; 🕒 8pm Fri) from outside the Church Inn on the Buttercross.

You can hire **rowing boats** (per 30min/1hr £3.50/6.50) to splash about on the river below the castle.

Festivals & Events

Markets are held every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The town's busy calendar peaks with the **Ludlow Festival** (☎ 872150; www.ludlowfestival.co.uk), a fortnight of theatre and music in June and July that uses the castle as its dramatic backdrop. It's no surprise that most of the other events are foodie affairs. The renowned **Ludlow Marches Food & Drink Festival** (☎ 873957; www.foodfestival.co.uk) is one of Britain's best, and takes place over a long weekend in September.

Sleeping

Mount (☎ 874084; www.themountludlow.co.uk; 61 Gravel Hill; s £30, d £50-60; P ⊠) Its hillside location secures this attractive Victorian house a glorious sunset view over town and hills, alone worthy of the modest price tag. Walkers and cyclists are well catered to, despite unforgivingly crisp white bed linen and cream carpets, and the welcoming hostess offers lifts from the train station.

Bromley Court (☎ 876996; www.ludlowhotels.com; 73 Lower Broad St; d £75-110) In Ludlow's heart, these three gorgeous stone-walled Georgian cottages form carefully furnished split-level suites complete with lounge and kitchenette. The balance of period features and modern luxury is spot on. Breakfast is served in a connected cottage, and there's also a communal patio.

Feathers Hotel (☎ 875261; www.feathersatludlow.co.uk; Bull Ring; s/d £75/100; P) Three storeys of stunning black-and-white timber-framed façade serve to introduce this famous Jacobean inn. Not all rooms are in the wonderfully atmospheric original building, so make sure you're getting the real McCoy when booking. Newer rooms follow the usual bland template with antique-styled trimmings. The modern restaurant (set lunch/dinner £15/25) is recommended.

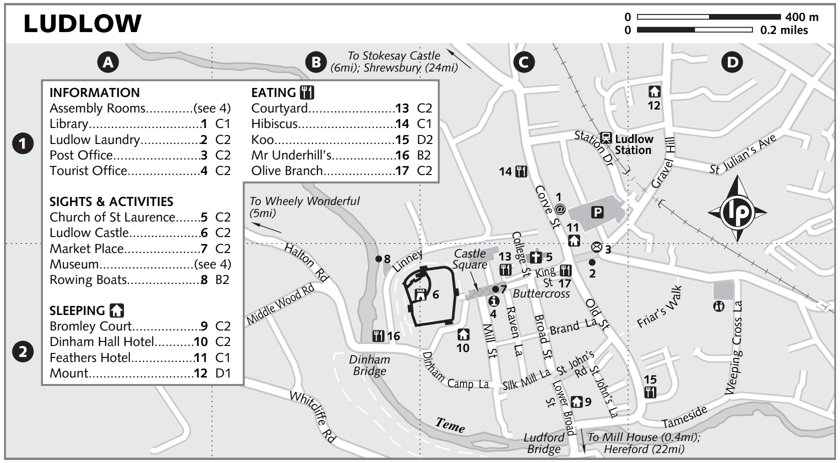
Other options:

Mill House (☎ 872837; www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk/mill; Squirrel Lane, Lower Ledwyche; s/d £25/60; P ⊠) Converted mill within walking distance of town beside the Shropshire Way.

Dinham Hall Hotel (☎ 876464; www.dinhamhall.co.uk; s £95, d £140-240; P ⊠) Resplendent 18th-century country manor with superb traditional restaurant.

Eating

If you can afford to splurge on food, this is unquestionably the place to do it. While we've cherry-picked our favourites, you needn't go far for more epicurean delights.


LUDLOW
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
To Stokesay Castle (6mi); Shrewsbury (24mi)
INFORMATION
Assembly Rooms............(see 4)
Library.............................1 C1
Ludlow Laundry................2 C2
Post Office.......................3 C2
Tourist Office...................4 C2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
Church of St Laurence.......5 C2
Ludlow Castle...................6 C2
Market Place....................7 C2
Museum.........................(see 4)
Rowing Boats...................8 B2
SLEEPING
Bromley Court..................9 C2
Dinham Hall Hotel...........10 C2
Feathers Hotel.................11 C1
Mount............................12 D1
EATING
Courtyard........................13 C2
Hibiscus..........................14 C1
Koo.................................15 D2
Mr Underhill's.................16 B2
Olive Branch...................17 C2
To Wheely Wonderful (5mi)
Station Dr
Ludlow Station
Gravel Hill
St Julian's Ave
Corve St
P
Halton Rd
Linney
Castle Square
College St
King St
Buttercross
Old St
Friar's Walk
Middle Wood Rd
Mill St
Raven La
Broad St
Brand La
Weeping Cross La
Dinham Bridge
Dinham
Camp La
Silk Mill La
St John's Rd
St John's La
Lower Broad St
Whitcliffe Rd
Teme
Tameside
Ludford Bridge
To Mill House (0.4mi); Hereford (22mi)

Olive Branch (☎ 874314; 2-4 Old St; mains £5-8; 🕒 10am-3pm) A healthful and mostly vegetarian lunch stop with seasonal menu.

Courtyard (☎ 878080; www.thecourtyard-ludlow.co.uk; 2 Quality Sq; mains £6.50-9; 🕒 lunch) A wholesome affair and antidote to too much extravagance, this staunchly old-fashioned café spills out onto a tranquil courtyard and has a faithful local following for its lightning service, good seasonal food and simple snacks.

Koo (☎ 878462; 127 Old St; 3-course set menu £18.95; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) The simple flower-dotted décor mirrors the crisp clean flavours of this authentic little Japanese cubbyhole, which is both a culinary and a cultural experience to savour. Favourites include sushi, gyoza dumplings and, during the festival, takeaway bento boxes (£8.50) for impromptu picnics.

Hibiscus (☎ 872325; www.hibiscusrestaurant.co.uk; 17 Corve St; set lunch/dinner menu £25/45; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This ground-breaking twice-Michelin-starred restaurant serves modern French cuisine with inventive flavour fusions. The serious business of eating is conducted within the oak-panelled and exposed-brick walls of a 17th-century coach house.

Mr Underhill's (☎ 874431; www.mr-underhills.co.uk; Dinham Weir; 6-course set menu £40; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Ludlow's other Michelin-rated big cheese is set in a converted corn mill that dips its toes in the river. Expect exquisite modern British food, though there's little choice before dessert, so make any dietary requests beforehand. It also offers stylish rooms (singles £100, doubles £115 to £160).

Getting There & Around

Trains go twice-hourly to Shrewsbury (£7.70, 30 minutes) and Hereford (£5.90, 21 to 24 minutes), and hourly to Church Stretton (16 minutes). Slower buses also go to Shrewsbury (bus 435; 1½ hours, eight daily) and radiate to nearby towns.

You can hire bikes from **Wheely Wonderful** (☎ 01568-770755; www.wheelywonderfulcycling.co.uk; Petchfield Farm, Elton; bike/tandem per day £15/28), 5 miles west of Ludlow.

WORTH THE TRIP

Waterdine Inn (☎ 01547-528214; www.waterdine.com; Llanfair Waterdine; s/d with dinner & breakfast £80/160; P ⊠) A flower-traced 16th-century longhouse nestled well and truly in the back of beyond, with the River Teme border with Wales trickling in the back garden the only reminder of an outside world. Expect a warm welcome that's helpful to a fault, and lovely cottage-style rooms with low ceilings, wooden furniture and springy beds. The restaurant also has a just-like-home atmosphere divided between several rooms, while the excellent modern Anglo-French menu (mains £11 to £16) focuses on organic meats and wild game. Llanfair Waterdine is about 12 miles west of Ludlow.

AROUND LUDLOW

Stokesay Castle

The wonky timber-framed tops and stunning Jacobean gatehouse of **Stokesay Castle** (EH; ☎ 01588-672544; adult/under 5yr/5-15yr £4.80/free/2.40; 🕒 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Mar-May & Sep-Oct, 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Nov-Feb) give this fortified 13th-century manor house a fairy-tale glow that is hard to shake off. Built by Britain's most successful wool merchant, Lawrence of Ludlow, it has changed little since it was completed in 1291 and boasts a cavernous Great Hall, original timber staircase and gabled windows, and an enchanting garden that's hardly been touched since the original owners first pitched their medieval forks.

Stokesay Castle is 7 miles northwest of Ludlow, just off the A49. Bus 435 runs five times daily between Shrewsbury and Ludlow. Alternatively, catch the train to Craven Arms, just over a mile away.

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The Midlands

'The heart of England': that's how Midlanders like to describe their region. Wits in Scotland and Wales quip that 'the groin of Britain' is more apt. If that's so, then this nether region is more fertile than most. It has produced arguably the world's greatest playwright in William Shakespeare, and millions still make the pilgrimage to his pretty birth-town, Stratford-upon-Avon. While a youthful Shakey frolicked by the River Avon, the magnificent Warwick Castle – still beautifully preserved – was being forged a short way upstream. Meanwhile, in Kenilworth, another castle blossomed before it crumbled into disrepair and formed a hauntingly evocative ruin. And to the north the mighty Gothic Lichfield Cathedral scores highly on the spine-tingling and memorable scale too.

Midlands' cities do suffer a bad rap, however. WWII bombs, dire town planning, and a gritty industrial history have tarnished their reputation. But now an infectious cosmopolitan energy is changing all that. Nightlife and shopping hotspots are booming – and they're good value compared with London. And, once you've filled your boots with the urban good life, there's plenty of rural relief. Walkers and bikers flock to the lovely Peak District, while unspoilt towns and villages distinguish the countryside of Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

Heart or groin, the message is clear: you shouldn't neglect it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drinking in the untamed beauty of the Peak District around **Edale** (p449)
- Strolling around the quirky lost 'seaside' resort of **Matlock Bath** (p442)
- Getting down to the famous live music of Birmingham's **Jam House** (p416)
- Marvelling at the human drama of a Shakespeare play at **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422)
- Blasting off into the orbit of Leicester's **National Space Centre** (p431)
- Stepping back in time at the glorious, medieval **Warwick Castle** (p420)

Edale
Matlock Bath
Leicester
Birmingham
Warwick
Stratford-upon-Avon

■ POPULATION: 9.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 11,551 SQ MILES

Orientation

It is perhaps easiest to orientate yourself here by motorways. The M1 winds north from London, demarking the eastern third of the region (which is bounded to the east by the A1). It runs parallel with a line of the East Midlands' major towns: Bedford, Northampton, Leicester, Derby and Nottingham, in that order. The M40 does the same for the south and west of the region, passing Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick on its way to the M42 and Birmingham in the centre of the Midlands. Routes spider out from Birmingham: the M6 runs east towards Coventry and the M1, and northwest up towards Wolverhampton, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent; the M54 splits off at Wolverhampton to head over to Telford and Shrewsbury. The Peak District is midway between the M1 and the M6.

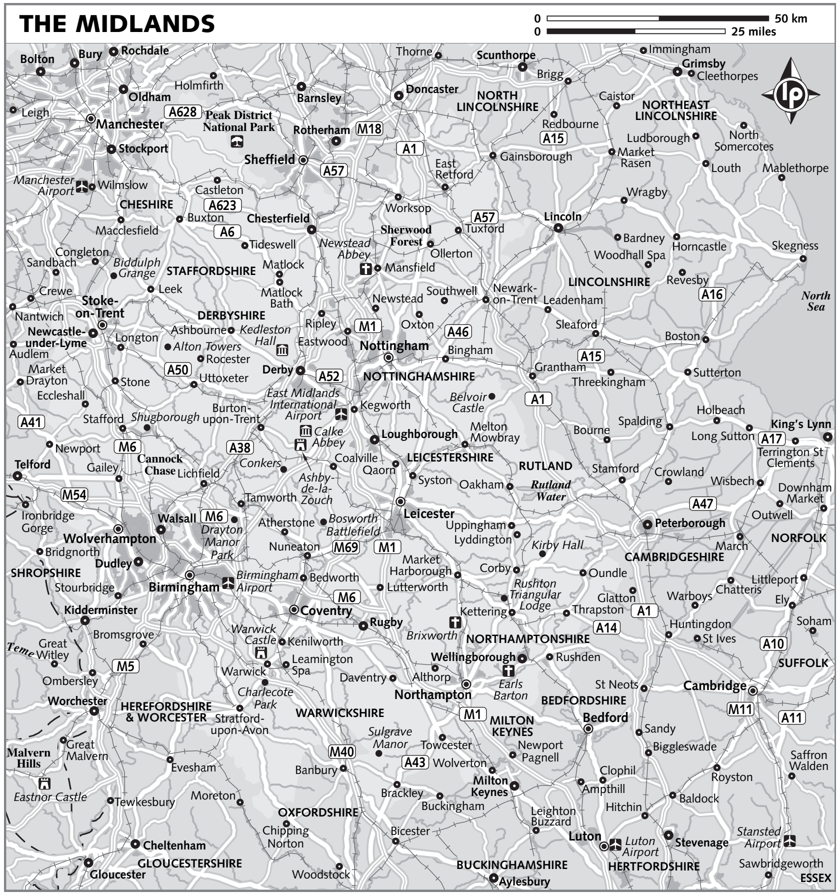
Information

The **Heart of England Tourist Board** (☎ 01905-761100; www.visitheartofengland.com) has centralised tourist information for the region and is a good place to start your planning.

Activities

The Peak District National Park is one of the finest areas in England for **walking** and **cycling**; see p446 for more details. It's also home to the start of the Pennine Way national trail, which leads keen walkers for 268 miles through Yorkshire and Northumberland into Scotland. The Pennine Bridleway starts south of the walking

THE MIDLANDS


0
50 km
0
25 miles
Bolton
Bury
Rochdale
Thorne
Scunthorpe
Immingham
Grimsby
Cleethorpes
Holmfirth
Oldham
Barnsley
Doncaster
NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE
Brigg
Caistor
NORTHEAST LINCOLNSHIRE
Leigh
A628
Peak District National Park
Manchester
Rotherham
M18
Redbourne
A15
Ludborough
North Somercotes
Stockport
Sheffield
A1
Gainsborough
Market Rasen
Louth
Mablethorpe
A57
East Retford
Manchester Airport
Wilmslow
Castleton
Wragby
CHESHIRE
A623
Worksop
Buxton
Chesterfield
A57
Tuxford
Lincoln
Macclesfield
A6
Tideswell
Newstead Abbey
Sherwood Forest
Bardney
Horncastle
Skegness
Woodhall Spa
Congleton
Sandbach
Biddulph Grange
STAFFORDSHIRE
Matlock
Mansfield
Ollerton
Revesby
LINCOLNSHIRE
Crewe
Leek
Matlock Bath
Newstead
Southwell
Newark-on-Trent
Leadenham
A16
North Sea
Nantwich
Stoke-on-Trent
DERBYSHIRE
Ripley
M1
Oxton
Sleaford
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Longton
Ashbourne
Kedleston Hall
Eastwood
Nottingham
A46
Boston
Audlem
Alton Towers
Rocester
Bingham
A15
Market Drayton
A50
Stone
Uttoxeter
Derby
A52
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Grantham
Sutterton
Eccleshall
Threekingham
East Midlands International Airport
Belvoir Castle
A1
A41
Stafford
Shugborough
Burton-upon-Trent
Kegworth
Holbeach
Calke Abbey
Loughborough
Melton Mowbray
Bourne
Spalding
Long Sutton
A17
King's Lynn
Newport
M6
A38
Cannock Chase
Coalville
LEICESTERSHIRE
Terrington St Clements
Telford
Gailey
Lichfield
Conkers
Qaorn
RUTLAND
Stamford
Crowland
Wisbech
M54
Ashby-de-la-Zouch
Syston
Oakham
Rutland Water
Downham Market
Tamworth
Leicester
A47
Outwell
Ironbridge Gorge
Walsall
M6
Atherstone
Bosworth Battlefield
Uppingham
Peterborough
Wolverhampton
Drayton Manor Park
Lyddington
NORFOLK
Bridgnorth
Nuneaton
M69
M1
Kirby Hall
March
Dudley
Market Harborough
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
SHROPSHIRE
Birmingham Airport
Bedworth
Corby
Oundle
Littleport
Stourbridge
Birmingham
Lutterworth
Rushton Triangular Lodge
Glatton
Warboys
Chatteris
M6
Ely
Kidderminster
Coventry
Kettering
Thrapston
A1
Rugby
Soham
Bromsgrove
Warwick Castle
Kenilworth
Brixworth
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
A14
Huntingdon
St Ives
Teme
Great Witley
Leamington Spa
Wellingborough
Rushden
A10
M5
Warwick
SUFFOLK
Ombersley
Daventry
Althorp
St Neots
Cambridge
Charlecote Park
Northampton
Earls Barton
Worcester
HEREFORDSHIRE & WORCESTER
Stratford-upon-Avon
WARWICKSHIRE
BEDFORDSHIRE
Bedford
M11
A11
M1
MILTON KEYNES
Sandy
Malvern Hills
Great Malvern
Sulgrave Manor
Towcester
Newport Pagnell
Biggleswade
Saffron Walden
Evesham
M40
Banbury
A43
Wolverton
Clophil
Royston
Eastnor Castle
Tewkesbury
Moreton
Brackley
Milton Keynes
Ampthill
Buckingham
Baldock
OXFORDSHIRE
Leighton Buzzard
Hitchin
Chipping Norton
Bicester
Luton
Luton Airport
Stevenage
Stansted Airport
Cheltenham
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
HERTFORDSHIRE
Sawbridgeworth
Gloucester
Woodstock
Aylesbury
ESSEX

route and is designed for **horse riding** and off-road cycling as well as walking. About one-third of a planned 350-mile route is now open.

But these long-distance epics are the tip of the iceberg; the Peak District is crisscrossed with a vast network of paths for walkers, country lanes for touring cyclists, and tracks and bridleways for mountain bikers – with something for every level of ability. Ideal bases include the villages and towns of Buxton, Matlock Bath, Edale and Castleton, or the national park centre at Fairholmes on the Derwent Reservoirs. Bikes can be hired at Fairholmes and various other points around the Peak District, especially in the areas where old railway lines have been converted into delightful walking and cycling tracks.

In the south of the Midlands region, other good places for walking and cycling include Cannock Chase and, for those who are after more sedate options, the National Forest, an ongoing project to plant 30 million trees across this part of central England. The main centre (called Conkers) is near Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire.

Water-lovers of all levels also flock to Rutland Water, a giant reservoir, for **sailing** and **windsurfing**. It is surrounded by cycling and walking trails if the wet stuff is not your thing.

A **canal boat** is one of the most fun ways to get active, with the metropolis of Birmingham the unlikely epicentre. Get a group of you on board with bikes, and you can enjoy the canal-side paths by wheel or by foot at your leisure, as you gently chug your way through the country's massive network of manmade waterways; see the boxed text, p92, for how to get started.

More information on all the above can be found in the Outdoor Activities chapter, p83.

Getting There & Around

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) is the main coach service in the Midlands and throughout the country. Birmingham is a major hub. For regional bus timetables, consult **SCB East Midlands Travel & Leisure** (www.scbeastmidstravel.co.uk). Regional bus services are provided by **Stagecoach** (☎ 01788-535555; Explorer tickets adult/child £6.50/4.50) and **Travel West Midlands** (www.travelwm.co.uk). Take the right money for the latter as no change is given on any of its services. **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinemidlands.co.uk) is a comprehensive and impartial guide to transport in the region and beyond.

BIRMINGHAM

☎ 0121 / pop 977,087

Once a drab, grimy urban basket case, England's second-largest city – nicknamed 'Brum' – has spectacularly reinvented itself as a vibrant, cultural hot spot. Huge regeneration projects have breathed life into the industrial landscapes and canals that crisscross the city; now there are more glamorous shops, buzzing pubs and jumping nightclubs than you can shake a bargepole at.

Mind you, it's still no oil painting. The familiar destructive brew of WWII bombs and woeful town planning left a legacy of concrete and ring roads that will probably never fully be disguised. But, no matter: Birmingham is making the most of what it's got. Established cultural and architectural gems dot the city centre and planners keep coming up with ever more innovative architectural makeovers: the striking postindustrial Bullring shopping centre is just the latest. Although the manufacturing industry that defined Birmingham as the 'workhorse of the world' is declining (workers at the Longbridge Rover car factory recently felt the pinch of the moribund UK car industry), the city is well placed to adapt. More self-assured, cool and confident than it has been in many a year, it is hampered by only one thing – its inhabitants' accent, which is consistently voted England's least attractive.

HISTORY

One of the great centres of the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham has been the birthplace of several inventions; it was home to steam pioneers James Watt (1736–1819) and Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) and chemist Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), to name a few. By the mid-19th century, though, the city exemplified much that was bad about industrial development. It wasn't until the mid-1800s, under enlightened mayors such as Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), that Birmingham first became a trendsetter in civic regeneration. But WWII air raids and postwar town planners were to undo their good work in large part.

Fortunately, the city's leadership is once again devoting itself to ground-breaking civic revitalisation, creating the award-winning Brindleyplace, the Mailbox, Millennium Point and, most recently, the Bullring in formerly grim urban wastelands.

ORIENTATION

The one aspect of Birmingham that's still indisputably a nightmare is driving in it. The endless ring roads, roundabouts and underpasses make it particularly confusing for motorists to navigate. It's wise to park somewhere and explore the city on foot until you get your bearings.

Taking the huge Council House as the centre, to the west is Centenary Sq, the International Convention Centre and Symphony Hall, and the development at Gas St Basin and Brindleyplace.

Southeast of the Council House, most of Birmingham's shops can be found along pedestrianised New St and in the modern City Plaza, Pallasades and Pavilions shopping centres. The Arcadian centre is further south, but still in the centre, and marks the beginning of Chinatown. Between New St station and Digbeth coach station is the Bullring, a sleek, architecturally striking shopping complex (see www.bullring.co.uk).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bonds Books (☎ 427 9343; www.bondbooks.co.uk; 97a High St, Harborne) Well-known independent bookstore, about 10 minutes' bus journey from the centre.

Waterstone's High St (☎ 633 4353; 24 High St); New St (☎ 631 4333; 128 New St)

Emergency

Police station (☎ 0845 113 5000; Steelhouse Lane)

Internet Access

Central Library (☎ 303 4511; Chamberlain Sq; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Internet access is free by reservation.

Orange Studio (☎ 634 2800; www.orangestudio.co.uk; 7 Cannon St; per hr £2; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat) This hip 'chat café' – an offshoot of a major mobile phone network – also has an upmarket 1st-floor restaurant.

Internet Resources

BBC Birmingham home page (www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham)

Birmingham Council (www.birmingham.gov.uk)

Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery (www.bmag.org.uk) Information on most of the city's museums and galleries, including opening hours, admission costs and forthcoming exhibitions.

Birmingham UK (www.birminghamuk.com)

Gay Birmingham (www.gaybrum.com) Information for gay visitors.

icBirmingham (http://icbirmingham.icnetwork.co.uk) The local newspaper's website.

Travel West Midlands (www.travelwm.co.uk) Travel planning from the main bus company.

Laundry

Laundry & Dry Cleaning Centre (☎ 771 3659; 236 Warwick Rd, Sparkhill)

Left Luggage

New Street station (☎ 632 6884; Station Forecourt; locker hire per day £5.50; 🕒 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun)

Media

Various free magazines fill hotel lobbies, bars and restaurants, providing handy updates on current exhibitions, restaurants, and the hippest bars and clubs. Pick of the bunch is the fortnightly *What's On* magazine, free at some bars and the tourist office.

Medical Services

Birmingham Children's Hospital (☎ 333 9999; Steelhouse Lane)

Heartlands Hospital (☎ 424 3263; Bordesley Green E) Catch bus 15, 17 or 97.

Money

American Express (☎ 644 5555; Bank House, Cherry Union St)

HSBC Bank & Thomas Cook Exchange (☎ 643 5057; 130 New St)

Lloyds TSB (2 Brindleyplace)

NatWest Bank (Arcadian Centre)

Post

Central post office (1 Pinfold St, Victoria Sq; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat)

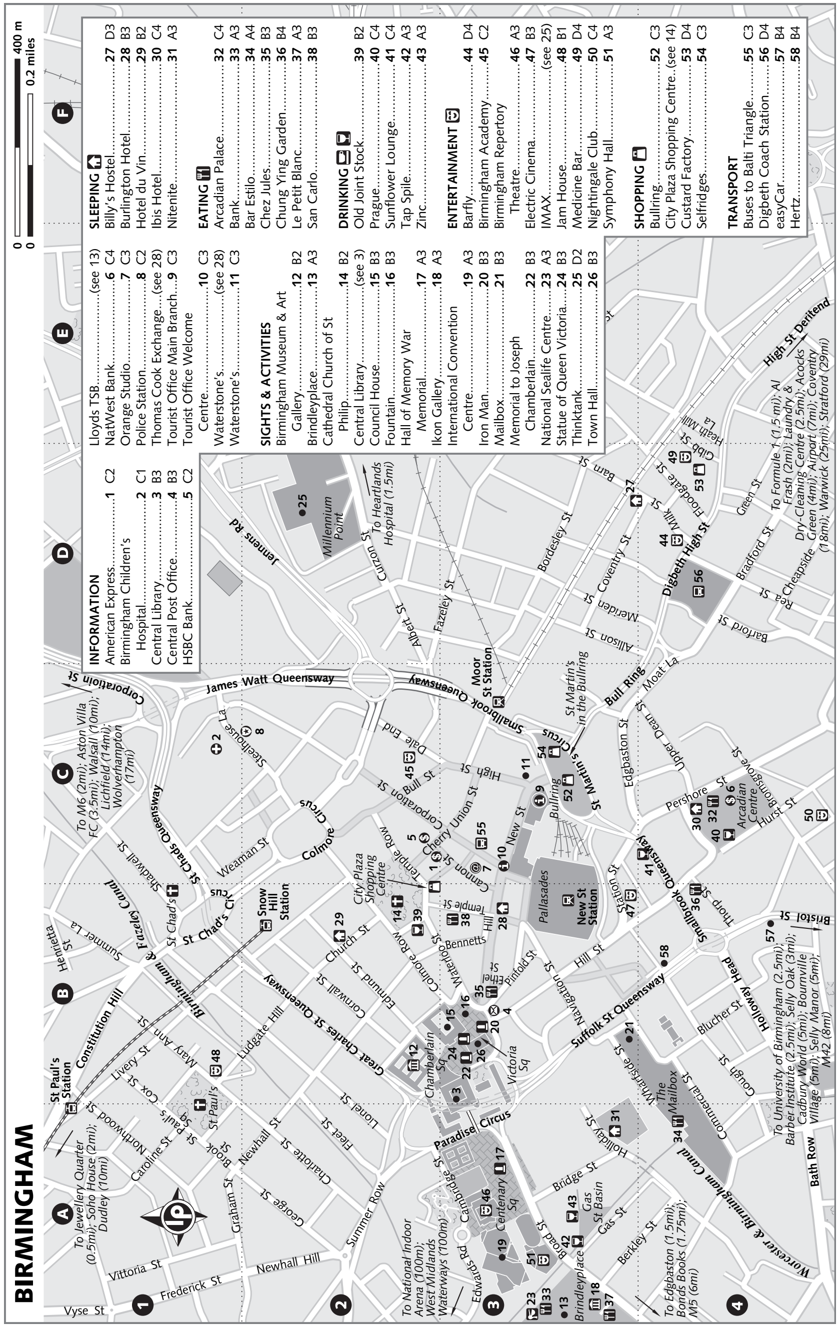
Tourist Information

Tourist office (www.birmingham.org.uk) Main branch (☎ 202 5099; The Rotunda, 150 New St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-5.30pm Tue, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun); Welcome Centre (cnr New & Corporation Sts; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) The helpful, brochure-stuffed main branch has a wide range of maps and themed leaflets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

What were once the scariest parts of Birmingham – the area around the Bullring, for example – have been transformed by the city's dramatic refurbishments. And the city's vibrant nightlife means there's as much activity

BIRMINGHAM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Birmingham Children's Hospital 2 C1
Central Library 3 B3
Central Post Office 4 B3
HSBC Bank 5 C2
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Ikon Gallery 18 A3
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Iron Man 20 B3
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National Sealife Centre 23 A3
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Birmingham Academy 45 C2
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To M6 (2mi); Aston Villa FC (3.5mi); Walsall (10mi); Lichfield (14mi); Wolverhampton (17mi)
To Heartlands Hospital (1.5mi)
To Formule 1 (1.5mi); Al Frash (2mi); Laundry & Dry-Cleaning Centre (2.5mi); Acocks Green (4mi); Airport (7mi); Coventry (18mi); Warwick (25mi); Stratford (29mi)
To University of Birmingham (2.5mi); Barber Institute (2.5mi); Selly Oak (3mi); Cadbury World (5mi); Bournville Village (5mi); Selly Manor (5mi); M42 (8mi)
To Edgbaston (1.5mi); Bonds Books (1.75mi); M5 (6mi)
To National Indoor Arena (100m); West Midlands Waterways (100m)
Millennium Point
Snow Hill Station
Moor St Station
New St Station
St Paul's Station
Paradise Circus
Chamberlain Sq
Centenary Sq
Victoria Sq
The Mailbox
Bullring
Pallasades
City Plaza Shopping Centre
Arcadian Centre
Digbeth High St
Smallbrook Queensway
Suffolk St Queensway
Great Charles St Queensway
St Chads Queensway
James Watt Queensway
Birmingham & Fazeley Canal
Worcester & Birmingham Canal

on the main streets at 2am as there is at 2pm, although the area around Digbeth bus station has an edge to it. As in most large cities, it's wise to avoid walking alone late at night in unlit areas, particularly if you're a woman.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Town Centre

The central pedestrians-only Victoria Sq features a giant **fountain** of a bathing woman (nicknamed, amusingly, 'the floozy in the Jacuzzi'), and a drab **statue of Queen Victoria**. It adjoins Chamberlain Sq, with its **memorial to Joseph Chamberlain**, one of Birmingham's more enlightened mayors. These squares share some eye-catching architecture. The imposing **Council House** forms the northeastern face of the precinct. Its northwestern corner is formed by the modernist **Central Library**, reminiscent of an inverted ziggurat, with the Paradise Forum shop and café complex next to it.

To the south is the **Town Hall** (1834), designed by Joseph Hansom (creator of the hansom cab, forerunner to London's black taxis) to look like the Temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome. For those who won't make it to Gateshead to see Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* statue (p626), his wingless **Iron Man** (1993), on Victoria Sq, is a step in the same direction.

West of the precinct, Centenary Sq is another pedestrian square closed off at the western end by the **International Convention Centre** and the Symphony Hall (p417), and overlooked by the Repertory Theatre. Inside the square is the **Hall of Memory War Memorial**, and there are often temporary exhibitions.

The impressive **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 303 2834; www.bmag.org.uk; Chamberlain Sq;

BIRMINGHAM IN...

Two Days

There's no mistaking where Birmingham excels these days: shopping. Feel your cash burn a hole in your pocket as you work through the series of exceptional commercial redevelopments that have rejuvenated the city. Perhaps work from east to west. Take in the quirkily original **Custard Factory** (p417) before heading up to the more mainstream **Bullring** (p417) with its space-age Selfridges building and hundreds of outlets. Dip south to the chic **Mailbox** (p412) and then take the trek up to the historical **Jewellery Quarter** (p412). Even if the credit has run dry, it is well worth a look. Being a shameless consumer is hungry work, but Brindleyplace has the answer: the **Bank** (p416) restaurant is one of the city's slickest places to eat. Then retrace your steps either to the **Jam House** (p416) in the Jewellery Quarter or the **Medicine Bar** (p416) in the Custard Factory – both rocking nights out. Gently does it on day two. Nourish the soul with the free, Pre-Raphaelite-studded **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (above). We then recommend a bit of people-watching in Birmingham's historical core around Victoria, Chamberlain and Centenary Sqs before you catch a bus or taxi to the famous **Balti Triangle** (p415) to sample the curry dish that was born in Birmingham.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, but add a **cruise** (p414) along Birmingham's extraordinary canal network. A show at the world-class **Repertory** (p417) should be next on the cards. Next morning, make a pilgrimage to the **Barber Institute** (p413) to see one of the region's most outstanding art collections. For a sweet interlude, make your way down to the chocolate paradise of **Cadbury World** (p412) for a seriously sugary experience. In the evening, take in an art-house film at the **Electric** (p417), the oldest working cinema in the country.

One Week

Follow the four-day schedule then use the extra days to visit outlying areas. In the summer, you can take a **steam train** (p418) to Shakespeare's **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422). More conventional trains head to **Lichfield** (p426), with its marvellous three-spired cathedral. Twenty miles east of Birmingham is Coventry, with Sir Basil Spence's fantastic postwar **St Michael's Cathedral** (p419), which is symbolically joined to the bombed-out old cathedral. Or, for a longer jaunt, escape to the **Peak District** (p444) for three days of long walks and cosy pubs.

admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10.30am-5pm Fri, 12.30-5pm Sun) has displays of local and natural history, archaeology and ethnography exhibits, and a renowned collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Other highlights include a fine porcelain collection and works by Degas, Renoir and Canaletto. You can sip coffee and nibble cake in the charming Edwardian tearoom.

One of England's smallest cathedrals, the striking **Cathedral Church of St Philip** (☎ 262 1840; Colmore Row; donations requested; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), was constructed in a neoclassical style between 1709 and 1715. The Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones was responsible for the magnificent stained-glass windows: the *Last Judgement,* which can be seen at the western end, and *Nativity, Crucifixion* and *Ascension* at the eastern end.

Gas Street, Brindleyplace & the Mailbox

Birmingham sits at the heart of England's canal network (the city actually has more canals than Venice), and visiting narrowboats can moor in the Gas St Basin right in the heart of the city. Nearby Brindleyplace, a waterfront development of trendy shops, restaurants and bars created during the 1990s, has transformed the area west of Centenary Sq into a buzzing nightlife scene. A similar development to the southeast, the Mailbox, is even more style-conscious, bristling with designer boutiques and smart restaurants.

The **Ikon Gallery** (☎ 248 0708; www.ikon-gallery.co.uk; 1 Oozells Sq, Brindleyplace; admission free; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a stylishly converted Gothic schoolhouse divided into smallish rooms. It has changing exhibitions of contemporary visual art. The Spanish cuisine dished up in the adjoining café is a great option for refuelling between cultural hot spots – but it will lighten your pockets.

The **National Sealife Centre** (☎ 633 4700; www.sealifeeurope.com; 3a Brindleyplace; adult/child £12.50/8.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun), a state-of-the-art facility designed by Sir Norman Foster, is the largest inland aquarium in England; it swarms with exotic marine life. There's a sea-horse breeding facility – if you're lucky you might get a rare glimpse of a male sea horse delivering his thousand babies. The otter sanctuary is also a favourite with kids.

Jewellery Quarter

Birmingham has long been a major jewellery production centre, and the Jewellery Quarter is packed with manufacturers and showrooms. The tourist office provides a free booklet *Jewellery Quarter: The Essential Guide*, which includes information about the industry and details of walking trails around the district.

In the **Museum of the Jewellery Quarter** (☎ 554 3598; 75-79 Vyse St; admission free; 🕒 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun), the Smith & Pepper jewellery factory remains as it was on the day it closed in 1981 – including abandoned tea mugs and Marmite jars – after 80 years of operation. You can explore the long history of jewellery-making in Birmingham and watch demonstrations of the art.

The Jewellery Quarter is about three-quarters of a mile northwest of the centre; catch one of a host of buses (101 is the easiest), or take the Metro from Snow Hill or the train from Moor St to Jewellery Quarter station.

Within walking distance of the Jewellery Quarter is **Soho House** (☎ 554 9122; Soho Ave, Handsworth; admission free; 🕒 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), where the industrialist Matthew Boulton lived from 1766 to 1809. It has been painstakingly restored to reflect the styles of Boulton's era, and features displays on the great man's life and the lives of his associates, including James Watt. Buses 74 and 79 pass nearby, or take the Metro to Benson Rd station from Snow Hill.

Outlying Areas

Chocoholics from miles around flock to **Cadbury World** (☎ 0845 450 3599; www.cadburyworld.co.uk; Linden Rd; adult/child £12.50/9.50), which provides a lip-smacking exploration into the history, production and consumption of the ever popular confectionery, seen through the eyes of one of the world's largest chocolate-makers. Kids – and sweet-toothed grown-ups – will love it, but beware of the afternoon sugar-crash! Ride a beanmobile or wander down Cocoa Rd, paved with 'talking chocolate splodges'. If you're lucky, you may get to see the finishing touches being put to your favourite chocolate. Book ahead – it's very popular in July and August. Opening hours vary. It's closed for some of December and most of January, but open from 10am to 3pm or 4pm for most of the rest of the year (phone or check the website for details).

Cadbury World is part of pretty **Bournville Village**, designed for early-20th-century factory workers by the Cadbury family. Large houses, each unique, are set around a green. **Selly Manor** (☎ 472 0199; Maple Rd; adult/child £3/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri year-round, plus 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep), dating from 1327 or earlier, was carefully taken apart and reconstructed by George Cadbury – who looks remarkably like Sigmund Freud – in order to save it from destruction. It has 18th-century furnishings and a Tudor garden.

The easiest way to get to Bournville is by train from Birmingham New St (five minutes). You can also get bus 45 or 47. Ask the driver to let you off at Pershore Rd.

East of the centre, the Millennium Point development is designed to help people understand science and technology. The focal point is **Thinktank** (☎ 202 2222; www.thinktank.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £6.95/4.95; 🕒 10am-5pm), an ambitious attempt to make science accessible (primarily to kids). Interactive displays cover topics such as the body and medicine, science in everyday life, nature, future technology, and industrial history, as well as an impressive new digital **Planetarium** (admission £1, advance booking required).

A visit to the **Barber Institute** (☎ 414 7333; www.barber.org.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is, for art lovers, a highlight of a trip to Birmingham. The collection takes in Renaissance masterpieces, paintings by old masters such as Rubens and Van Dyck, British greats including Gainsborough, Reynolds and Turner, an array of impressionist pieces and modern classics by the likes of Picasso and Schiele.

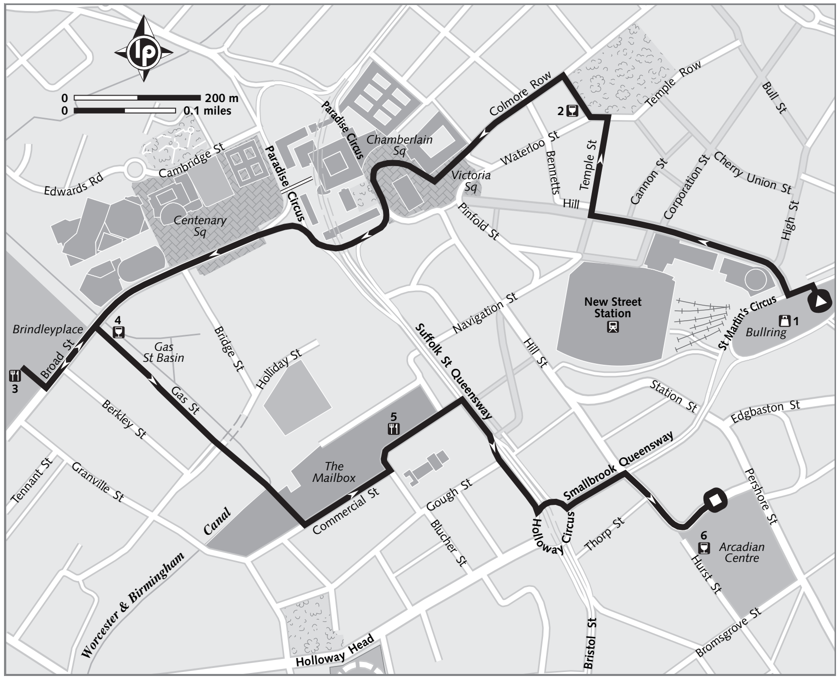
The Barber Institute is at the University of Birmingham, 2.5 miles south of the city centre. Take the train from New St to University station, or catch bus 61, 62 or 63 from Corporation St.

BRUM NIGHTLIFE WALKING TOUR

Birmingham by night is one of the most buzzing, vibrant metropolises in the UK – no onlooker could call this part of the world drab after a wander through the streets at midnight on a Friday. This tour, about 2 miles, will take you through some of the hippest, most happening and memorable nightspots in town. Put aside two hours if you're pressed for time, otherwise just go with the flow...

WALK FACTS

Start Bullring
Finish Prague
Distance 2 miles
Duration two hours or more



Ease yourself into the tour with a shot of caffeine at the balcony café by the space-age Selfridges in the **Bullring** (**1**; p417). A spot of people-watching later and it's time to hit the road. Weave between the New St late shoppers and branch off to the magnificent **Old Joint Stock** (**2**; p416) pub where you can share the suits' relief as they spill out of the nearby offices. Skirt by the old cathedral, ease your way through Victoria Sq then Chamberlain Sq and wander through Centenary Sq, mingling with the theatre fans and concertgoers. In winter, get your skates on at the ice rink, while temporary open-air exhibitions divert passers-by at most times of the year. Hungry yet? Just a little bit further and swanky Brindleyplace has just the answer with the peerless **Le Petit Blanc** (**3**; p416). Sit down and let your olfactory senses be pampered. Appetite quenched? Now creep out to Broad St. Look right, look left. Quick, dash between the screeching hen and lairy stag parties and duck into the one oasis of sanity in this part of town, the **Tap & Spile** (**4**; p416). Fine ales on tap in a nooks-and-crannies pub are your reward. Now take the downstairs exit by the canal and stroll south by the water where the new, flashily revamped Mailbox development looms ahead. Join the city's bright young things in **Bar Estilo** (**5**; opposite). There are plenty of other sleek places to be seen in this well-heeled part of town, which could easily distract you from the final leg of our tour, the Arcadian Centre, chock-a-block with night-time options, including buzzing **Prague** (**6**; p416). You've got this far, the rest of the night is up to you...

BIRMINGHAM FOR CHILDREN

The most obvious place to keep the kids entertained is Cadbury World (p412). Partly educational, it should also satisfy any sweet-tooth cravings until Christmas. Ease away the sugar high with a family cruise (see right) down one of Birmingham's many narrow canals; a crucial part of the kids' education on why the city really mattered in the UK's development.

Just away from the Brindleyplace section of the canal, the National Sealife Centre (p412) has water creatures aplenty. Playful otters will appeal to everyone, but especially the little ones. Meanwhile, there's plenty to explore at the Thinktank (p413), a gigantic attraction where the goal is to make science exciting and accessible, in particular for children. And you're unlikely to hear too many peeps from them with absorbing 3D films at the IMAX (p417) cinema in the same complex.

TOURS

Second City Canal Cruises (☎ 236 9811; www.secondcityboats.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/2.50) Hour-long tours leave by arrangement from the Canalside Souvenir Shop in Gas St Basin.

Sherborne Wharf (☎ 455 6163; www.sherbornewharf.co.uk; Sherborne St; 🕒 trips at 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm & 4pm daily mid-Apr–Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov–mid-Apr; adult/child £4.50/4) Canal cruises leave from the International Convention Centre quayside.

West Midlands Waterways (☎ 200 7400; www.waterscape.com; Cambrian House, 2 Canalside; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) Has leaflets, advice on days out by the water and details on how and where to hire canal boats. It's off King Edwards Rd.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Birmingham has a number of interesting cultural festivals. Here are some of the highlights.

Crufts Dog Show (www.crufts.org.uk) The world's largest dog show, in March, with more than 20,000 canines on parade.

Gay Pride (www.birminghamgaypride.co.uk) One of the largest and most colourful celebrations of gay and lesbian culture in the country; held in May.

Collide (☎ 303 3984; www.collide-arts.co.uk) Birmingham City Council runs this ground-breaking arts festival, from May to June, showcasing works from up-and-coming local black and Asian artists.

Latin American Festival (www.abslatin.co.uk) This annual festival in June/July celebrates the Latin American community and culture in Birmingham.

Artsfest (www.artsfest.org.uk) The UK's largest free arts festival features visual arts, dance and musical performances in various venues across the city in September.

Heritage Open Days (☎ 0870 240 5251; www.heritageopendays.org) This unique event in September allows visitors free access to historic properties that are not usually open or normally charge an entrance fee.

Horse of the Year Show (www.hoys.co.uk) Top show-jumping equestrian event in October.

SLEEPING

Central hotels tend to court business visitors and are usually at the higher end of the price spectrum, but often reduce their rates at the weekend. Check online or ask about specials at the tourist office, which also makes bookings. Few B&Bs are central, but many lie within a 3-mile radius of the centre, especially in Acocks Green (southeast) and the area stretching from Edgbaston to Selly Oak (southwest).

Budget

Billy's Hostel (☎ 07951 745102, 07930 143439; gdbirmingham@hotmail.co.uk; 58 Coventry St; dm £17; 🅿) It's the only backpackers joint in town, a very basic place a short walk from Digbeth bus station. It's not salubrious, but it seems secure. The welcome is warm enough – and the pub is literally right downstairs.

Formule 1 (☎ 773 9583; www.hotelformule1.com; 3 Bordesley Park Rd, Small Heath Highway; r £24.95; 🅿) Cheap as chips, soulless, modern and clean: this place uses the same formula here as it does elsewhere. Rooms fit up to three people and it's about 20 minutes' walk from the centre.

Midrange

The better midrange options tend to be out of town – character-challenged chains dominate the centre, although they are convenient.

Awentsbury Hotel (☎ 472 1258; www.awentsbury.com; 21 Serpentine Rd, Selly Park; s/d incl breakfast from £42/56; 🅿) The imposing Victorian exterior belies a welcoming B&B in the best English tradition at this house in Selly Park, close to the university. It also boasts a private vintage-car collection and a top-notch cooked breakfast.

Nitenite (☎ 236 9000; www.nitenite.com; 18 Holliday St; r £49.95; 🅿 ♿) This unusual place shouldn't be comfortable but somehow is. Rooms are tiny and have giant plasma TV screens with live Birmingham webcam images instead of windows. Yet the custom-made beds and leather fittings make it seem cosy rather than cramped.

Westbourne Lodge (☎ 429 1003; www.westbournelodge.co.uk; Fountain Rd; s/d incl breakfast £55/75; 🅿 💻) Removed from the bustle of the city centre, this is still conveniently located just off the main road in southwest Edgbaston. Affable owners take pride in their terrace, a boon in the summer months. White-linen rooms are frilly but not overly so.

Ibis Hotel (☎ 622 6010; fax 622 6020; Arcadian Centre, Ladywell Walk; d £56.95; 🅿 💻) You know exactly what you're getting here: a spotless identikit room with the same wallpaper that you'll get in the same hotel chain in Mozambique. Within the Arcadian Centre by Chinatown, it's in a convenient location for a night out. Parking is £10 per night.

Top End

Burlington Hotel (☎ 643 9191; www.burlingtonhotel.com; Burlington Arcade, 126 New St; s/d Sun-Thu £145/155, Fri & Sat £90/130; 🅿 💻) The venerable old gentleman of Birmingham hotels, the Burlington is lavishly furnished with marble hallways and expensive glass lampshades. Some classic rooms have stand-alone bathtubs. Despite its size (there are 112 rooms), it feels quite personal and the restaurant is a fine option for sophisticated Continental cuisine.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 200 0600; www.hotelduvin.com; Church St; d from £135; 🅿 💻) Elegant, chic...and *cher*, this is a seriously opulent boutique hotel, converted, bizarrely, from a Victorian eye hospital. Egyptian linen and duck-down duvets characterise the bedrooms. Ask for an inside room overlooking the courtyard. Manicures, massages and spas are all options for the indulgent. Bookings are advised for its bistro restaurant.

EATING

Birmingham's most famous contribution to cuisine is the balti, a Pakistani dish that has been adopted by curry houses across the country. The heartland is the Birmingham Balti Triangle in Sparkbrook, 2 miles south of the centre. Pick up a complete listings leaflet in the tourist office (or see the website www.thebaltiguide.com) and head out on bus 4, 5, 6, 12, 31 or 37 from Corporation St.

Al Frash (☎ 753 3120; www.alfrash.com; 186 Ladypool Rd, Sparkbrook; mains £3-8; 🕒 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat; 🅿) This is *the* place to experience the legendary Birmingham balti. Don't go for the flourishes – there aren't any. Just go for the massive excellent-value portions, and the good-natured service. If you're getting the bus ask the driver to stop by Ladypool Rd.

Arcadian Palace (☎ 622 3283; Unit B109 Arcadian Centre, Pershore St; mains £6-9; 🕒 noon-9.30pm Fri-Wed) Run by a supernice family, this simple, dinky, cafélike Chinese restaurant heaps the portions high and keeps the prices reasonably low. We liked the sizzling satay beef with crispy noodles (£6.80).

Chez Jules (☎ 633 4664; 5a Ethel St; mains £8-13, 2-course lunch £7.90; 🕒 noon-4pm & 5-11pm, closed dinner Sun) French finesse defines the great-tasting dishes served up at this excellent bistro. Burgundy walls, a spacious dining area, long benches – perfect for group dining – and reasonable house wine prices add a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

Bar Estilo (☎ 643 3443; 110-114 Wharfside St; mains £8-13, 2-course set lunch £8; 🕒 noon-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) A rustic chic interior – all terracotta, dimmed lighting and plush sofas – makes this bar-restaurant the venue of choice for the Mailbox smart set. The Mediterranean-influenced menu – the same as in the restaurant's London-based siblings – is reasonable, especially at lunchtime.

Chung Ying Garden (☎ 666 6622; 17 Thorp St; mains £8-14; 🕒 noon-11pm) Get beyond the occasionally surly service and you'll be hard-pressed to fault the fine Cantonese dishes at this cavernous Chinatown favourite. With 70 varieties of dim sum, the biggest challenge is selecting from the menu!

San Carlo (☎ 633 0251; 4 Temple St; mains £10-16; 🕒 noon-11pm) With Italian food far better than most mammas ever manage, this slick central restaurant is a magnet for local celebrities – although service can be on the haughty side.

Le Petit Blanc (☎ 633 7333; 9 Brindleyplace; mains £10-17; 🕒 noon-2.45pm & 5.30-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Seriously stylish brasserie with contemporary French cuisine, this place exhibits all the hallmarks of its owner, Française superchef Raymond Blanc. Reservations are recommended.

Bank (☎ 633 4466; 4 Brindleyplace; 3-course meal £12.50, mains £12-20; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun; Ⓟ) Huge glass front panels make this swanky restaurant a bit of a culinary goldfish bowl, but most diners don't complain – the sophisticated modern-Brit dishes are quite special.

DRINKING

Chain pubs litter the city centre, especially on the deeply unappealing main Broad St drag. There are, however, more than a few gems if you know where to look.

Tap & Spile (☎ 632 5602; Gas St; 🕒 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) Overlooking the canal, this traditional pub is all hidden alcoves and corners, especially once you move away from the sardine tin that is the top bar. There's a good selection of ales on tap here too.

Old Joint Stock (☎ 200 1892; 4 Temple Row West; 🕒 closed Sun) This vast, high-ceilinged cathedral of beer, a former bank, is marred by service without a smile. But the glittering furnishings and impressive setting, together with some half-decent ales, make it worth a stop.

Sunflower Lounge (☎ 472 0138; 76 Smallbrook Queensway; 🕒 noon-11pm Mon-Wed, noon-1am Thu & Fri, 1pm-2am Sat, 5pm-10.30pm Sun) A quirky little mod bar in an unlikely setting by a dual carriageway near the New St train station, this is a relatively undiscovered little gem favoured by the indie crowd, and with a great alternative soundtrack. Live gigs occur regularly in the tiny underground basement venue.

Prague (☎ 666 7789; 101 Hurst St; 🕒 11am-11pm Mon-Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat, to midnight Sun) Leather sofas; white-tile floor; glammed-up crowds; and a cool, funk-grooved dance soundtrack make this the bar of choice among discerning Arcadian Centre revellers. Portuguese-inspired dishes are also served.

Zinc (☎ 200 0620; Regency Wharf, Gas St Basin) Übermodern Conran bar-diner with an enticing menu and relaxed jazz and funk soundtrack.

ENTERTAINMENT

Tickets for most Birmingham events can be purchased through the national **TicketWeb** (☎ 08700 600 100; www.ticketweb.co.uk). It is cheaper to book online than on the phone. Also check the listings in *What's On* magazine for what's going on.

Nightclubs

Birmingham is throbbing with some of the best nights out in the country. Discover just how rocking the city's after-hours life can be at any of the following.

Medicine Bar (☎ 224 7502; www.factoryclub.co.uk; Custard Factory, Gibb St; 🕒 doors open 10pm) The crew working this joint are too cool for school. But they know only too well they are mixing it in the hippest, most happening nightspot in town with a truly eclectic range of nights, from Asian dub to hip-hop to electro pop. A blast.

Nightingale Club (☎ 0871 505 5000; Kent St; 🕒 5pm-late) Birmingham's most established gay nightclub, the Nightingale rocks on three levels, with pop on the bottom floor, and techno rocking the upstairs. Remarkably, after more than three decades of action, it still tops polls as the region's premier gay club and is a known breeding ground for top-name DJs.

Live Music

Jam House (☎ 200 3030; www.thejamhouse.com; 1 St Paul's Sq; 🕒 noon-midnight Mon & Tue, noon-2am Wed-Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) Legendary pianist Jools Holland directs the tunes here, an effortlessly classy live-music bar that features live swing, jazz, R&B and rock'n'roll, mixed in with the occasional reggae and ska. This is a real treat. Drinks are pricey, but the vibe is worth it. And if you're feeling like a splurge, the global cuisine of the top-floor restaurant hits all the right notes too.

Birmingham Academy (☎ 262 3000; www.birmingham-academy.co.uk; 52-54 Dale End) The best rock and pop venue in town, attracting big-name acts – The Strokes and Primal Scream are recent guests. Its indie club nights are a big draw too.

Barfly (☎ 633 8311; www.barflyclub.com; 78 Digbeth High St) Recently opened, this place is a grooming stable for up-and-coming indie bands, spawned by the success of a London-based night. It is warming up now – the bands are getting bigger, and the crowds are getting thicker. The entrance is on Milk St.

Symphony Hall (☎ 780 3333; www.symphonyhall.co.uk; Broad St; tickets from £7.50) For classical music, including performances by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, seek out the ultramodern Symphony Hall, which is known for its superb acoustics. World music and jazz acts also feature.

The giant **National Exhibition Centre Arena** (☎ 767 2937), near Birmingham International Airport, hosts major rock and pop acts, as does its sister venue, the **National Indoor Arena** (☎ 767 2937; King Edwards Rd) behind Brindleyplace.

Theatre & Cinemas

Birmingham Repertory Theatre (☎ 236 4455; www.birmingham-rep.co.uk; Centenary Sq, Broad St) In two venues, the Main House and the more experimental Door, 'the Rep' presents top-notch drama, Noel Coward comedies and plays fresh from London's best theatres.

Electric Cinema (☎ 643 7879; www.theelectric.co.uk; 47-49 Station St; adult/child £6/4) Projectors have been rolling here for nigh 100 years, making it the oldest working cinema in the UK. It has an interesting art-house line-up.

IMAX (☎ 202 2222; www.imax.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £6.50/4.50) Birmingham's first Imax cinema, with a five-storey screen, is housed in the same building as the Thinktank.

Sport

Villa Park (☎ 327 5353; www.avfc.co.uk; tickets adult/child from £25/15) Aston Villa football club, one of the Midlands' most enduring teams, plays in this arena north of the city centre.

Warwickshire County Cricket Club (☎ 446 5506; www.edgbaston.com; County Ground, Edgbaston; tickets from £12) Tickets for international test matches sell out early, but local matches are usually available. The Twenty 20 games are pulsating, even for the uninitiated.

SHOPPING

Custard Factory (☎ 604 7777; www.custardfactory.com; Gibb St, Digbeth) One of the most unique, quirky places to shop in Birmingham, full of original, independent shops. So named because the building was constructed a century ago by custard magnate Sir Alfred Bird, this fantastic, eye-catching development is a memorable place to buy things you never knew you wanted. Funky niche shops are dotted between an arts and media centre; try the Urban Village for some retro-chic clothing and furnishings.

Jewellery Quarter (www.the-quarter.com) The obvious place for unique local shopping in Birmingham. Much of the jewellery manufactured in England comes from this region and there are more than a hundred shops selling traditionally handcrafted gold and silver jewellery, watches and more. The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (p412) has leaflets detailing notable retail outlets and artisans.

Another option for serious retail therapy is the **Bullring** (☎ 632 1500), a hellhole-turned–gleaming mall boasting '26 football pitches worth of shops, boutiques and restaurants'. The Selfridges department store is worth a visit for the architecture alone.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Birmingham has a busy **international airport** (☎ 0870 733 5511; www.bhx.co.uk) with flights mainly to European destinations and New York. It's about 8 miles east of the centre of Birmingham.

Bus

Most intercity buses run from dismal Digbeth coach station, which thankfully is due to be knocked down and rebuilt soon. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs coaches between Birmingham and destinations around England including London (£14.50, 2¾ hours, hourly), Oxford (£10.20, 1½ hours, five daily) and Manchester (£11.20, 2½ hours, 11 daily). Bus X20 runs to Stratford-upon-Avon hourly on weekdays (1¼ hours) from Birmingham Moor St.

Train

Most longer distance trains are operated by Virgin Trains from New St station, beneath the Pallasades shopping centre, including those to London (£14.50 value advance single, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Manchester (£9.50 value advance single, 1¾ hours, every 15 minutes). Other services, such as those to Stratford-upon-Avon (£5.40 single, 50 minutes, hourly), run from Snow Hill and Moor St stations.

In July and August, the **Shakespeare Express steam train** (☎ 708 4960; www.vintagetrains.co.uk; standard return £20) operates between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford-upon-Avon twice each Sunday. Journeys take one hour.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Trains are the easiest option for getting to the airport. They run frequently between New St and Birmingham International station (20 minutes, every 10 minutes). Bus 900 runs to the airport (45 minutes, every 20 minutes) from Moor St Queensway. A **taxi** (☎ 427 8888) from the airport to the centre costs about £20.

Car

Car rental agencies:

easyCar (☎ 0906 333 3333; www.easycar.co.uk; 17 Horse Fair, Birmingham)
Hertz (☎ 782 5158; 7 Suffolk St)

Public Transport

Centro (☎ 200 2700; www.centro.org.uk), the transport authority for the Birmingham and Coventry area, provides general travel advice and a guide to getting around the West Midlands for those with mobility difficulties. The Daytripper ticket (adult/child £4.50/2.80) gives all-day travel on buses and trains after 9.30am; if you need to start earlier, buy a Centrocard (£5.60). Tickets are available from the **Central Travel Information Centre** (New St station). **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608) has comprehensive travel information.

Local trains operate from Moor St station, which is only a few minutes' walk from New St; follow the red line on the pavement.

Birmingham's tram system, the **Metro** (www.travelmetro.co.uk), runs from Snow Hill to Wolverhampton via the Jewellery Quarter, West Bromwich and Dudley. Fares start at 70p and rise to £2.20 for the full length. A day pass covering both Metro and bus costs £4.25/2.80.

TOA black cabs taxis (☎ 427 8888) are a good, reliable taxi firm.

WARWICKSHIRE

Warwickshire got lucky: it could have been just another picturesque English county but history makes it one of the most visited areas outside of London. Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick's superb castle are the main draws. Other, lesser known attractions can be just as rewarding, however: try the hauntingly atmospheric Kenilworth Castle ruins or the visit the cathedrals (yes, plural) that shaped Coventry's history.

Orientation & Information

Warwickshire is roughly kidney shaped, with Coventry sitting between the lobes. Kenilworth, Leamington Spa and Warwick lie in the line running south from Coventry; Stratford-upon-Avon sits on the southern side of the M40 motorway bisecting the lower lobe.

The Shakespeare Country tourism website (www.shakespeare-country.co.uk) has information on the whole region.

Getting Around

The Warwickshire transport site (www.warwickshire.gov.uk/transport) has details of local bus and train services, as well as news on roads. Coventry is a major transport hub, with rail connections to London Euston and Birmingham New St.

A good ticket option is the Chiltern Rover (adult three days £39), which allows return train travel from London Marylebone or Paddington to Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick or Leamington Spa on three chosen days within a seven-day period. It also includes unlimited travel in areas between, including Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and free travel on Warwickshire's Stagecoach bus network. You can only buy the ticket from London's Marylebone Station.

COVENTRY

☎ 024 / pop 300,848

The city was blitzed so badly in WWII that the Nazis coined a new verb 'Coventrieren', meaning 'to flatten'. Postwar planning doomed Coventry to a nondescript concrete centre apart from the striking new cathedral, which was built alongside the bombed-out shell of the old. There are enough cathedrals to go round here – another even older one was recently excavated. The city also has an interesting industrial history as a prolific car-maker, the product of which can be seen in an absorbing transport museum.

Orientation & Information

Central Coventry is surrounded by a stark concrete ring road; most of the city's sights lie within. The main Pool Meadow bus station is central, while the train station is just outside of the ring road to the south. The **tourist office** (☎ 7622 7264; www.visitcoventry.co.uk; 4 Priory Row; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun) is on a cobbled street on the approach to the cathedrals.

Sights

The pretty **cathedral quarter** is historically the richest part of the city. The wonderfully evocative **cathedral ruins** of St Michael's Church Cathedral, destroyed by Nazi incendiary bombs in the blitz of 14 November 1940, still stand as a permanent memorial. The 180 steps of its **Gothic spire** can be climbed for some panoramic views. Symbolically adjoining the old cathedral's sandstone walls is the Sir Basil Spence–designed **cathedral** (☎ 7622 7597; www.coventrycathedral.org.uk; Priory Row; suggested donation £3; 🕒 9am-5pm), a modern, almost Gothic, architectural masterpiece. It includes a giant Graham Sutherland tapestry of Christ, glorious stained-glass nave windows (best seen from the altar), and a towering etched glass front. Look out for the Jacob Epstein statue of St Michael's conquest over the devil outside the main entrance. The story of the massive **St Mary's cathedral**, the original Coventry cathedral dismantled following the Reformation, is told in the small but well-presented **Priory Visitor Centre** (☎ 7655 2242; Priory Row; admission free; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun).

Further north, the extensive **Coventry Transport Museum** (☎ 7683 2425; www.transport-museum.com; Hales St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) shows off the city's turbo-charged manufacturing past. It boasts the biggest collection of British-built vehicles in the world, most of them assembled in Coventry. They range from early bicycles to the slightly zippier Thrust SSC, the fastest land vehicle ever.

Sleeping

Ashdowns Guest House (☎ 7622 9280; 12 Regent St; s/d £25/50; Ⓟ) Quirky, chintzy place nestled in a quiet residential street, seven minutes' walk from the train station. It is run by a welcoming, retired couple, who will give you chapter and verse on their interesting assorted antique clutter if you inquire.

Hylands Hotel (☎ 7650 1600; hylands@bestwestern.co.uk; 153 Warwick Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £56/85; Ⓟ 💻) Some rooms here greet you with a faded, musty air; pine bed-frames and park views freshen up others, especially rooms numbered in the 80s. It's less than five minutes from the train station.

Eating & Drinking

Browns (☎ 7622 1100; Earl St; 🕒 closed dinner Sun) With a door policy that makes Groucho's look slack, Browns nevertheless is one of the most easygoing, stylish places around. Spacious (you can normally find a seat here) and split on two levels, it also dishes out excellent-value canteen-style meals.

Café Bar Inspire (☎ 7655 3355; New Union St; 🕒 11am-4pm Tue, noon-midnight Wed & Thu, 11am-2.30am Fri & Sat) Coventry's Christchurch church was destroyed during WWII, leaving only the spire, which now, slightly sacrilegiously, shelters this bar. This is forgivable as it is very good. It serves an international selection of bottled brews, as well as baguette and salad snacks (from £3.25) throughout the day.

Getting There & Away

Coventry is a convenient transport hub. Trains go south to London Euston (every 20 minutes, one hour 10 minutes) and Bournemouth, and you will rarely have to wait more than 10 minutes for a train to Birmingham. From the main bus station, there is a constant flow of National Express buses to most parts of the country. Bus X17 goes to Kenilworth, Leamington and Warwick (every 20 minutes).

WARWICK

☎ 01926 / pop 25,434

The magnificent turreted castle is the lure for most of the visitors to this quiet county town. It's an awe-inspiring sight – as are the queues in summer. Several other sights are less overrun, but also well worth stopping for. A gentle stroll round the centre reveals well-preserved historic buildings – survivors of a fire in 1694 that destroyed much of the town – as well as absorbing museums and fine riverside views.

Orientation & Information

Warwick is simple to navigate; the A429 runs right through the centre with Westgate at one end and Eastgate at the other. The town centre lies just north of this axis. The castle, which looms over the River Avon, is just south.

The **tourist office** (☎ 492212; www.warwick-uk.co.uk; Court House, Jury St; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm), near the junction with Castle St, sells the informative *Warwick Town Trail* leaflet (50p).

Sights

WARWICK CASTLE

Incredibly well-preserved medieval **Warwick Castle** (☎ 0870 442 2000; www.warwick-castle.co.uk; adult/child £15.95/9.95, peak dates £17.95/10.95; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; P) is a stunner. Part of the Tussauds Group (hence the eerily lifelike wax inhabitants), it is prone to commercialism and crowds. However, its grandeur, magnificent landscaped gardens, and a palpable sense of history, including displays on influential historical figures such as 'kingmaker' Earl of Warwick Richard Neville, make it a must-see.

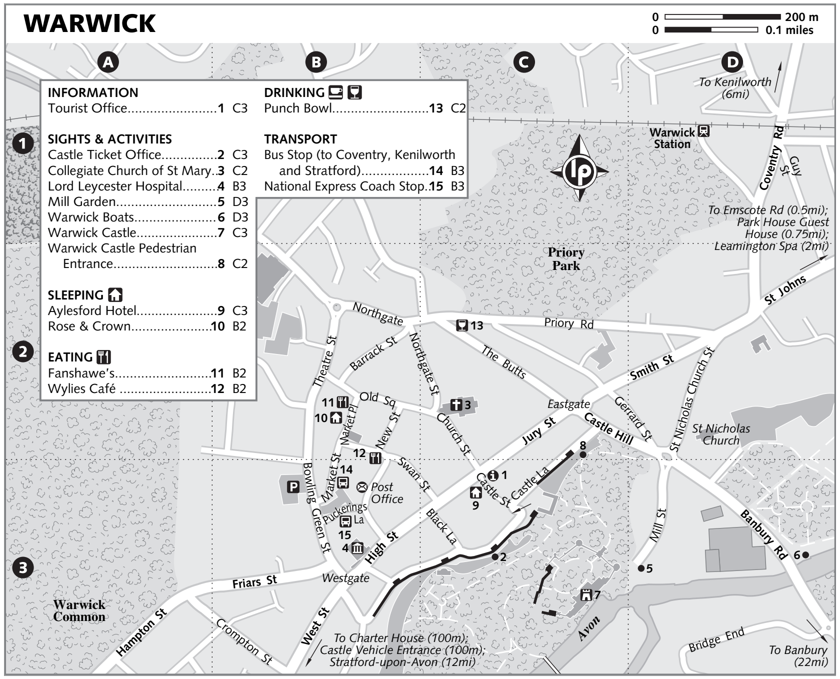
Plan on spending a full day if time permits. With waxwork-populated private apartments, superb interiors, ramparts, armour displays, dungeons (with torture chamber), the 'ghost tower' (called Warwick Ghosts 'Alive', entry £2.50), and a 19th-century power-generating mill house, there's more than enough to see.

COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF ST MARY

Originally built in 1123, this magnificent **church** (☎ 492909; Old Sq; suggested donation £2; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) has a soaring tower, visible for miles around. Climb it for a spectacular panorama (adult/child £2/50p). It was completed in 1704 after the 1694 Great Fire of Warwick gutted the original along with much of the church. The remarkable Beauchamp Chapel (built 1442–64) survived and the bronze tomb of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, still graces its centre. Ask one of the knowledgeable guides to point out 'the angel', a ghostly outline barely visible on the wall that was only recently spotted. Don't miss the 12th-century crypt with remnants of a medieval dunking stool, used to drench scolding wives.

LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

At the Westgate end of the town, the road cuts through a sandstone cliff, above which perches the improbably leaning, timber-framed **Lord Leycester Hospital** (☎ 491422; High St; adult/child £4.90/3.90, garden only £2; hospital 🕓 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). Despite its name, it was never a hospital. Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, made it a retirement home for soldiers and their wives in 1571 – and it's still one today. It has a beautiful courtyard, a fine chapel and a guildhall. There is also a small regimental museum and a café.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St Johns
Northgate
Priory Rd
The Butts
Smith St
Theatre St
Barrack St
Northgate St
Old Sq
Church St
Eastgate
Gerrard St
St Nicholas Church St
St Nicholas Church
Jury St
Castle Hill
Market Pl
New St
Swan St
Castle St
Castle La
Bowling Green St
Market St
Puckerings La
Post Office
Black La
High St
Mill St
Banbury Rd
Friars St
Westgate
Warwick Common
Hampton St
Crompton St
West St
To Charter House (100m); Castle Vehicle Entrance (100m); Stratford-upon-Avon (12mi)
Avon
Bridge End
To Banbury (22mi)

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

For a fragrant perspective of the castle, mosey down to the **Mill Garden** (☎ 492877; 55 Mill St; admission £1; 🕓 9am-6pm Apr-Oct), a wonderful effusion of plants and colours within splashing distance of the weir that powered the castle mill. Money raised from this enchanting little enclave goes to charity. A fine alternative view of the castle is offered actually on the river itself. Head to **Warwick Boats** (☎ 494743; St Nicholas Park; rowing boat hire 30/60min £6/9; 🕓 10am-6.30pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6.30pm Sat & Sun Mar-May, Sep & Oct).

Sleeping

The nearest hostel is in Stratford-upon-Avon (see p424). Midrange B&Bs line Emscote Rd, the eastern end of the main road through Warwick toward Leamington Spa.

Park House Guest House (☎ 494359; 17 Emscote Rd; s/d £27.50/45) This is a basic but affordable option in a Gothic-style town house, five to 10 minutes' walk from the centre towards Leamington Spa.

Rose & Crown (☎ 411117; www.roseandcrownwarwick.co.uk; 30 Market Pl; r incl breakfast £65; P 💻) These modernist, smartly decorated lodgings, all en suite, lie above a chic gastropub. There are only five rooms, so call in advance. Some have wireless internet access.

Aylesford Hotel (☎ 492799; www.aylesfordhotel.co.uk; 1 High St; s/d incl breakfast £65/80) A classic Georgian town house, the atmospheric Aylesford has well-kept rooms (including some with four-poster beds), a casual bistro and a revamped French restaurant that has reaped the plaudits from local food critics.

Eating & Drinking

Wylies Café (☎ 490448; Old Iron Yard; scones & tea £3; 🕓 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Hidden down a little side alley, this traditional tearoom is a delightful discovery. It is famous for its homemade cakes and delicious ice cream.

Fanshawe's (☎ 410590; 22 Market Pl; mains £11-19; 🕓 6-10pm Mon-Sat) From the rows of fussy flowers to the decorative china plates, this looks like an elderly aunt's living room. One that you don't mind visiting, however – the English cuisine is quite delectable.

Punch Bowl (☎ 403846; 1 The Butts) Guitars dangle from beams over the flagstone floors in this interesting Warwick pub. There are, of course, cask-conditioned ales and it serves reasonable food. Charming in a slightly cluttered way.

Getting There & Away

National Express coaches operate from Puckerings Lane on Old Sq. Local bus X17 runs to Coventry (55 minutes). Bus 18 goes to Stratford-upon-Avon (40 minutes, hourly) in one direction, and Leamington Spa (15 minutes) in the other. The main bus stops are on Market St.

Trains run to Birmingham (30 minutes, every half-hour), Stratford-upon-Avon (30 minutes, hourly) and London (1½ hours, every 20 minutes).

KENILWORTH

☎ 01926 / pop 23,219

One thing stands out in this pleasant, unremarkable pocket of middle England – its stunningly atmospheric ruined castle. With crumbling walls and vivid history, it inspired Walter Scott to use it as a setting for his novel, called...*Kenilworth*.

Information

Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 852595; Library, 11 Smalley Pl; 🕓 9am-7pm Mon & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Tue & Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat) for local tourist information.

Sights & Activities

Dramatic, red-sandstone **Kenilworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 852078; adult/child £4.90/3.30; 🕓 10am-5pm Mar-May, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is less visited than its more commercial neighbour in Warwick, but arguably more rewarding. Founded around 1120 and enlarged in the 14th and 16th centuries, powerful men, including John of Gaunt, Simon de Montfort and Robert Dudley (favourite of Elizabeth I), have held sway here. There is now a new exhibition on the relationship between Dudley and the 'Virgin Queen', who visited the castle to tremendous fanfare, in the recently refurbished Leicester's Gatehouse. Following the Civil War siege, the castle's vast lake was drained in 1644, and it fell into disrepair. The audio tour is highly recommended – you almost feel like Elizabeth I is sitting at your side. Various jousting events and performances take place here throughout the year. Call for details.

Sleeping & Eating

Castle Laurels Hotel (☎ 856179; www.castlelaurels.co.uk; 22 Castle Rd; s/d incl breakfast £45/75; P 💻) A stately guesthouse (B&B does not seem a posh enough name for it) opposite the castle, where the owners pride themselves on the spotless rooms and the warmth of the welcome. The home-cooked breakfasts (with free-range eggs) are lovely.

Virgins & Castle (☎ 853737; 7 High St; pub food £4-6, mains £9-11) This sprawling, comfortable old pub is a real local favourite, full of nooks and crannies and welcoming staff. It has a decent menu of Filipino specialities.

Clarendon Arms (☎ 852017; 44 Castle Hill; pub food £4-8, dinner mains £8-13) Right opposite the castle, this atmospheric pub has home-cooked food, a warm ambience and a cosy little beer garden.

Getting There & Away

Bus X17 runs to and from Warwick (20 minutes), Coventry (25 minutes) and Leamington Spa (15 minutes).

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

☎ 01789 / pop 22,187

Few towns are so dominated by one man's legacy as Stratford is by a certain William Shakespeare, who was born here more than four centuries ago. Prepare to jostle for elbow room with coachloads of tourists in the antique houses associated with Britain's most famous wordsmith – certainly during summer and on most weekends. But if you choose your time, this pretty, historic market town should definitely be on your 'to visit' list: be sure to take in a play if you're hitting the Shakespeare trail. It is also a handy base for exploring the mighty Warwick and Kenilworth Castles and the picturesque Cotswold countryside.

Orientation

Arriving by coach or train, you'll find yourself within walking distance of the town centre, which is easy to explore on foot. Transport is only really essential for visiting Mary Arden's House.

Information

Cyber Junction (☎ 263400; 28 Greenhill St; ⏲ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat; per hr £4) Internet access and game play.

Sparklean Laundrette (☎ 269075; 74 Bull St; ⏲ 8am-9pm)

Tourist office (☎ 0870 160 7930; www.shakespeare-country.co.uk; Bridgefoot; ⏲ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Mar) Helpful, but frantically busy in summer.

Sights & Activities

SHAKESPEARE HOUSES

The **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** (☎ 204016; www.shakespeare.org.uk; adult/child all 5 properties £14/6.50, 3 in-town houses £11/5.50; ⏲ generally 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug, variable at other times) manages five buildings associated with Shakespeare. Three of the houses are central, the fourth is an easy walk away, and the fifth a drive or bike ride out; a combination ticket costs about half as much as the individual admission fees combined. Opening times are complicated and vary during the off season (check the website for details). In summer, enormous crowds pack the small Tudor houses; a visit out of season is much more enjoyable. Note that wheelchair access to the properties is restricted.

The number-one Shakespeare attraction, **Shakespeare's Birthplace** (Henley St), has a modern façade on one side, but behind that it's very much 'olde'. It's been a tourist hot spot for three centuries (though there's no conclusive evidence Will was born here). Famous 19th-century visitor-vandals have scratched their names on a window, and the guest book bears the signatures of some big-time literati. Family rooms have been re-created in the style of Shakespeare's time, and there's a 'virtual reality' display downstairs for visitors unable to access the upper areas. Tickets include admission to the adjacent **Shakespeare Exhibition**, where well-devised displays chart the life of Stratford's most famous son.

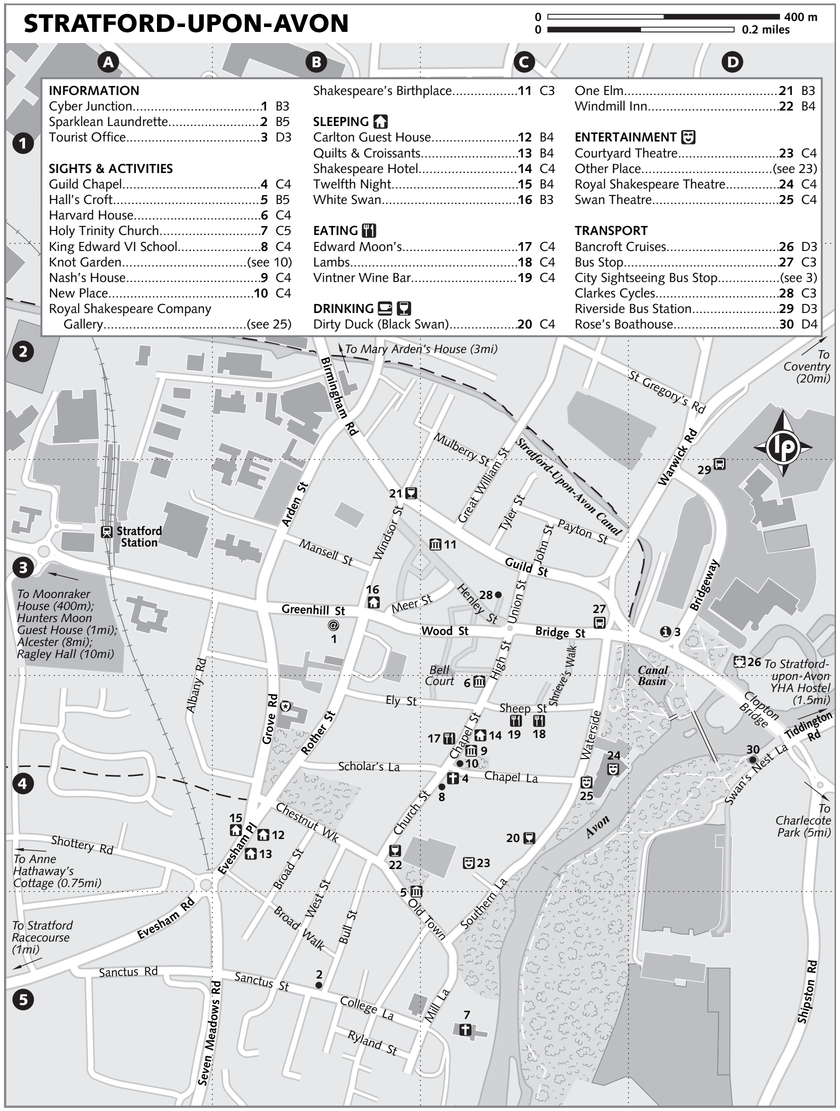
The wealthy, retired Shakespeare bought a fine home at New Pl on the corner of Chapel St and Chapel Lane. He died there in April 1616 and the house was demolished in 1759. An attractive Elizabethan **knot garden** now occupies part of the grounds. Displays in the adjacent **Nash's House**, where Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth lived, describe the town's history and contain a collection of 17th-century oak furniture and tapestries.

Shakespeare's daughter Susanna married the eminent doctor John Hall, and their fine Elizabethan town house, **Hall's Croft** (☎ 292107), stands near Holy Trinity Church. The main exhibition is a fascinating insight into medical practice in Shakespeare's time.

Before marrying, Shakespeare's wife lived in Shottery, a mile west of the centre, in a pretty thatched farmhouse now known as **Anne Hathaway's Cottage** (☎ 292100). As well as contemporary furniture there's an orchard and **Shakespeare Tree Garden**, with examples of all the trees mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. A footpath (no bikes allowed) leads to Shottery from Evesham Pl.

Mary Arden was Shakespeare's mother, and a **house** (☎ 293455) at Wilmcote, 3 miles west of Stratford, was her childhood home. If you cycle there via Anne Hathaway's Cottage, follow the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal towpath to Wilmcote rather than retracing your route or riding back along the busy A3400. The easiest way to get there otherwise is on a bus tour (see p424). The home of William's mother is now used to house the **Shakespeare Countryside Museum**, with exhibits tracing local country life over the past four centuries. Plan to spend more time here than at the other

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON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A
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To Mary Arden's House (3mi)
To Coventry (20mi)
St Gregory's Rd
Birmingham Rd
Mulberry St
Great William St
Stratford-Upon-Avon Canal
Warwick Rd
Arden St
Windsor St
Tyler St
John St
Payton St
Guild St
Stratford Station
Mansell St
Henley St
Meer St
Union St
Greenhill St
Wood St
Bridge St
Bridgeway
To Moonraker House (400m); Hunters Moon Guest House (1mi); Alcester (8mi); Ragley Hall (10mi)
Bell Court
High St
Shrieve's Walk
Canal Basin
To Stratford-upon-Avon YHA Hostel (1.5mi)
Clopton Bridge
Tiddington Rd
Albany Rd
Grove Rd
Rother St
Ely St
Sheep St
Waterside
Scholar's La
Chapel St
Chapel La
Swan's Nest La
Chestnut Wk
Church St
Avon
To Charlecote Park (5mi)
Shottery Rd
To Anne Hathaway's Cottage (0.75mi)
Evesham Pl
Broad St
West St
Old Town
Southern La
To Stratford Racecourse (1mi)
Evesham Rd
Broad Walk
Bull St
Sanctus Rd
Sanctus St
College La
Mill La
Ryland St
Seven Meadows Rd
Shipston Rd

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Sparklean Laundrette 2 B5
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properties to appreciate its unique collection of rare farm animals.

OTHER SIGHTS

Holy Trinity Church (☎ 266316; Old Town; 🕑 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Nov-Mar; admission to church free, Shakespeare's grave adult/child £1/50p) is thought to be the most visited parish church in England, as Shakespeare lies buried here. It's a lovely building in its own right, situated on the banks of the River Avon. The transepts from the mid-13th century are the oldest part. In the chancel are photocopies of Shakespeare's baptism and burial records, the graves of Will and his wife, and a bust created seven years after Shakespeare's death but before his wife's and thus assumed to be a good likeness.

The exuberantly carved **Harvard House** (☎ 204 407; High St; adult/child £2.75/free, free with Shakespeare Houses ticket; 🕑 noon-5pm Wed-Sun Jul-Sep, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun May, Jun, Sep & Oct) was home to the mother of John Harvard, after whom Harvard University in the USA was named in the 17th century. It now houses a **Museum of British Pewter**.

The **Royal Shakespeare Company Gallery** (☎ 412 617; admission free; 🕑 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.15am-4.15pm Sun), inside the Swan Theatre, is a small but absorbing display of props, costumes, photos and theatrical paraphernalia. **Theatre tours** (☎ 0870 609 1110; adult/child incl admission to RSC Gallery £5/4; 🕑 times vary, call in advance to check) offer a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes of a working theatre.

The **Guild Chapel** (cnr Chapel Lane & Church St) dates from 1269, though it was rebuilt in the 15th century. It's not open to the public except for services (10am Wednesday and noon Saturday April to September). Next door is **King Edward VI School**, which Shakespeare probably attended; it was originally the Guildhall.

Tours

Two-hour **guided walks** (☎ 292478; adult/child £5/2; 🕑 tours 11am Mon-Wed, 2pm Thu-Sun) depart from Swan fountain just by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Chill-seekers can also go to the same group for the **Stratford Town Ghost Walk** (adult/child £5/3; 🕑 7.30pm Mon, Thu & Fri) An alternative **walk** (☎ 292478; adult/child £8/6; 🕑 10.30am Sat) is run by the Royal Shakespeare Company, and leaves outside the Swan Theatre on Waterside.

Open-top buses of **City Sightseeing** (☎ 299123; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £9/4; 🕑 every 15min Apr-Sep, fewer in winter) go to each of the Shakespeare properties. They operate on a jump-on, jump-off basis, and are a convenient way of getting to the out-of-town houses.

Sleeping

Stratford's big hotels tend to be geared towards group travel, so they're often out of the price range of many independent travellers, and they fill up fast. B&Bs are plentiful though, and offer good-quality rooms in attractive Victorian houses. Vacancies can be hard to find, especially during summer. If there's no room at any of the following, the tourist office charges £3 plus 10% deposit to find something.

BUDGET

Stratford-upon-Avon YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 160 7930; stratford@yha.org.uk; Hemmingford House, Alveston; dm incl breakfast members/nonmembers £19.95/22.95; 🅿 💻) This four-star YHA is in a large, 200-year-old mansion 1.5 miles east of the town centre along Tiddington Rd. Buses X17/18/18A run to Alveston from Bridge St.

Quilts & Croissants (☎ 267629; rooms@quilt-croissants.demon.co.uk; 33 Evesham Pl; s/d incl breakfast £26/52; 🅿 🚭) A likeable family welcomes you here. Earth colours abound and the B&B is correspondingly warm and comfortable. The owners are keen theatregoers themselves, and can fill you in on the latest performances. Credit cards not accepted.

Other good budget options:

Stratford Racecourse (☎ 201063; info@stratfordracecourse.net; Luddington Rd; 2-person pitches £10; 🕑 Easter-Sep; 🅿) Camp site just off Evesham Rd a mile west of town.

Carlton Guest House (☎ 293548; 22 Evesham Pl; s/d incl breakfast £26/52; 🅿) The jolly proprietor has several reasonable en-suite rooms available.

MIDRANGE

Moonraker House (☎ 268774; www.moonrakerhouse.com; 40 Alcester Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £40/65; 🅿) Pristine to the point of fussy, the rooms behind the whitewashed façade of this memorable B&B are frilly, almost feminine affairs. Rooms have an unusual mix of themes – James Bond and Shakespeare. Impeccably attentive owners provide healthy organic and vegetarian options for breakfast.

Twelfth Night (☎ 414595; www.twelfthnight.co.uk; 13 Evesham Pl; s/d from £36/70; 🅿 🚭) Now an upmarket B&B, with flowery frills and gleaming brass bed frames, this once belonged to Royal Shakespeare Company governors. Breakfast is served on Wedgwood china.

TOP END

White Swan (☎ 297022; www.thewhiteswanstratford.co.uk; Rother St; s/d from £60/80; 🅿) All the quaint traits of a centuries-old hotel are here, from carved bed headboards to the atmospherically uneven floors. Rooms do vary. Plump for the oak-panelled delights of the traditional rooms (room 103 is perhaps the most charming) if possible – the standard rooms are quite ordinary.

Shakespeare Hotel (☎ 0870 400 8182; www.theshakespeare-hotel.co.uk; Chapel St; s/d £128/138; 🅿 💻) A labyrinth of rooms enchants guests at this classic hotel, the classiest in Stratford by a sonnet. The pick of the rooms are those named after Shakespeare's plays. Some you have to stoop to get into, but with their wooden-panelled headboards complemented by luxury bathrooms, they are the perfect base for soaking up the town's rich Elizabethan heritage.

Eating

Shakespearean tourism clearly makes you hungry: there's no shortage of good restaurants. Sheep St is clustered with refined but relaxed eating options, mostly aimed at theatregoers.

Vintner Wine Bar (☎ 297259; 5 Sheep St; mains £9-13; 🕑 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to 9.30pm Sun) The most down-to-earth of all the restaurant options on the gourmet Sheep St strip, this place is unpretentious and fun. The menu includes several inventive vegetarian options.

Edward Moon's (☎ 267069; 9 Chapel St; mains £10-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Inspired by an itinerant cook who loved English food spiced with local ingredients, Moon's is relaxed; it's distinguished by the entirely glass-panelled front.

Lambs (☎ 292554; 12 Sheep St; mains £11-18; 🕑 noon-2pm Mon-Sun, plus 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) From the imposing manor-house door to the aristocratic interior, this courses with effortless sophistication. Dishes, such as roasted saddle of lamb (£15.95), are not cheap, but it's the company you are keeping that counts, my dear.

Drinking

Dirty Duck (☎ 297312; Waterside) If you only have one drink in Stratford, come here. It's almost as essential as a trip to the theatre. Officially called the Black Swan, this enchanting alehouse is a favourite postperformance thespian watering hole, and has a roll call of former regulars (Olivier, Attenborough etc) that reads like an actors' *Who's Who*. It's in a very pretty location across from the river. The adjoining restaurant (11am to 10pm) is good value.

Windmill Inn (☎ 297687; Church St) Ale was flowing here at the same time as rhyming couplets flowed from Shakespeare's quill – it's been around a while. Despite its age it's still one of the liveliest places in town.

One Elm (☎ 404919; 1 Guild St) A swanky place with leather seats and sun-tanned clientele, this popular gastropub has a pleasant courtyard and owners who are real foodies – the restaurant dishes are a treat.

Entertainment

Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC; ☎ 0870 609 1110; www.rsc.org.uk; box office inside Royal Shakespeare Theatre; tickets £5-42; 🕑 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Seeing a RSC production is a must. Major stars have trod the boards here and productions are of a very high standard. Performances include the Bard's classics as well as contemporary offerings and take place in the main Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the adjacent Swan Theatre or the nearby Other Place. The main theatre will close for refurbishment in summer 2007. Performances will take place in the striking temporary Courtyard Theatre by the Other Place. Ticket prices depend on the performance and venue, but there are offers for under 25s, students, seniors and other groups, plus discounts for previews. Call or check the website for details – and book ahead for good seats. There are usually a few tickets sold on the day of performance.

Getting There & Away

The train station is a few minutes' walk west of the centre. Chiltern Railways offers direct services to London Marylebone (2¼ hours). Cheap returns (£15) are often available after 11am.

National Express destinations from Stratford's Riverside Bus Station include Birmingham (£6.50, one hour, twice daily), Oxford (£8.30, one hour, daily) and London Victoria (£15.00, 3½ hours, three daily).

In July and August, the **Shakespeare Express steam train** (☎ 0121-708 4960; www.vintagetrains.co.uk) operates between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford stations (adult/child single £10/5, return £20/10, one hour, twice each Sunday).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Stratford is small enough to explore on foot, but a bicycle is good for getting out to the surrounding countryside or the rural Shakespeare properties. The canal towpath offers a fine route to Wilmcote.

Clarkes Cycles (☎ 205057; Guild St; per half-/full day from £6/10; 🕘 9.15am-5pm Tue-Sat) rents bikes. It's down a little alley off Henley St (look out for the old sign saying Pashley Cycles).

BOAT

Punts, canoes and rowing boats are available from **Rose's Boathouse** (☎ 267073; row boats/punts per 30min £3/2) by Clopton Bridge. **Bancroft Cruises** (☎ 269669; www.bancroftcruises.co.uk) runs 45-minute trips (adult/child £4.50/2, daily April to October) leaving from the Holiday Inn hotel pier.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Staffordshire, in the words of Stoke-born novelist Arnold Bennett, has long been 'unsung by searchers after the extreme' – but if you took that to mean 'boring' you'd be mistaken. Though it's tucked between the urban sprawls of Birmingham and Manchester, the county has a surprising abundance of natural beauty, from rolling Cannock Chase, a magnet for walkers and cyclists, to the prickly spine of the Peak District known as the Roaches. The haunting Gothic might of Lichfield's wonderful cathedral, the wild rides at Alton Towers, and the neoclassical mansion of Shugborough are among the county's other charms.

Orientation

Staffordshire's attractions are spread fairly evenly around the county: Stoke to the northwest; the Peak District and Leek northeast, with Alton Towers just south; Lichfield southeast; and Stafford just southwest of the centre.

Information

Staffordshire Tourism (☎ 0870 500 4444; www.staffordshire.gov.uk/tourism) has general information on where to stay and what to do in the county.

Getting There & Around

Central Trains (☎ 0121-654 2040; www.centraltrains.co.uk)
Travel Line (☎ 0870 608 2 608)
Virgin Trains (☎ 0845 722 2333; www.virgin.com/trains)

LICHFIELD

☎ 01543 / pop 27,900

This pretty market town is home to one of England's most beautiful cathedrals, a monumental three-spired Gothic masterpiece that is worth the trip alone. It's also been something of a think-tank in its time: famed wit and lexicographer Samuel Johnson was born here, and Erasmus Darwin, Charles' grandfather and a man of note in his own right, lived and studied here for years.

Information

The thinly stretched **tourist office** (☎ 412121; www.visitlichfield.com; Lichfield Garrick, Castle Dyke; 🕘 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) doubles as the box office for the new Lichfield Garrick theatre.

Sights & Activities

LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL

The magnificent **cathedral** (☎ 306120; requested donation £4; 🕘 7am-6pm) boasts a fine Gothic west front adorned with exquisitely carved statues of the kings of England from Edgar to Henry I, and the major saints. Approach the blackened façade from town by Minster Pond and you won't be the first to get goose bumps as you look up to the cathedral's hallmark three spires – especially when they are floodlit by night. Most of what you see dates from the various rebuildings of the Norman cathedral between 1200 and 1350.

Inside, there is a superb illuminated manuscript from AD 730, the *Lichfield Gospels*, which is displayed in the beautifully vaulted mid-13th-century chapterhouse, while the Lady Chapel to the east boasts 16th-century Flemish stained glass. Following archaeological work in 2003, a Saxon statue of the Archangel Gabriel was uncovered beneath the nave, attracting a lot of press interest. If restoration work succeeds, it should soon be on display.

There are tours of the cathedral at 2pm Monday to Saturday and 1.30pm Sunday.

A stroll round the tranquil **Cathedral Close**, which is ringed with imposing 17th- and 18th-century houses, is also rewarding.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The amateurish but absorbing **Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum** (☎ 264972; www.lichfield.gov.uk/sjmuseum; Breadmarket St; admission free; 🕘 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, noon-4.30pm Oct-Mar) charts the life of one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the English language. Samuel Johnson, the pioneering lexicographer (dictionary-maker), was born here in 1709 and spent his formative years in this ramshackle, five-floored property that belonged to his bookseller father. Credited with inventing the dictionary, Samuel Johnson was immortalised in the famous biography *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, written by his close friend James Boswell. You can inspect the ground-breaking dictionary using the computer in the bookshop in the lobby.

Grandfather of the more famous Charles, Erasmus Darwin was himself a remarkable autodidact, doctor, inventor, philosopher and poet, influencing the Romantics. The **Erasmus Darwin Centre** (☎ 306260; Beacon St; adult/child £2.50/2; 🕘 noon-5pm Tue-Sun, last admission 4.15pm), in the house where he lived from 1758 to 1781, commemorates his life with a video, pictures and personal items. Exhibits and displays illustrate his varied work and association with luminaries such as Wedgwood, Boulton and Watt.

Sleeping

No 8 (☎ 418483; www.ldb.co.uk/accommodation.htm; 8 The Close; s/d incl breakfast from £30/50) The cathedral looms large over No 8 The Close, a comfortable family home that doubles as a B&B. There's no sign outside this listed town house; you should call in advance to make arrangements.

George Hotel (☎ 414822; www.thegeorgelichfield.co.uk; 12-14 Bird St; s/d Mon-Thu from £82/99, Fri-Sun £48/58; 🅿 💻) A rabbit warren of rooms winds through this 18th-century coaching inn in the heart of the city. Some of the double beds err on the small side, and parts are a bit worn, but the George (now part of the Best Western group) is generally comfortable and convenient.

Eating & Drinking

Chapters Cathedral Coffee Shop (☎ 306125; 19 The Close; sandwiches & salads £4-5; 🕘 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.45pm Sun) In a charming 18th-century house with a view onto some fine gardens, this café is ideal for a caffeine or snack pit stop, or even a full Sunday lunch (three-courses meal £14.50).

King's Head (☎ 256822; 21 Bird St) Samuel Johnson described Lichfield folk as 'the most sober, decent people in England' – but that was 250 years ago, and there are pubs aplenty these days. This place should be your first port of call. A traditional olde-worlde pub, it has been shaken up by new owners who put on live music on Thursday and Saturday. It is Lichfield's most welcoming alehouse.

Getting There & Away

Bus 112 runs to Birmingham, while the 825 serves Stafford (both £2.60 single, 1¼ hours, hourly). The bus station is opposite the central Lichfield City train station, with trains to Birmingham New St station (30 minutes, every 15 minutes). Direct trains to London Euston (from one hour 15 minutes, around eight daily) depart from Lichfield Trent Valley station, about 20 minutes' walk from town.

STOKE-ON-TRENT

☎ 01782 / pop 240,636

Staffordshire's industrial heart, though historically important in pottery production, holds limited appeal to the visitor, except in one department: the porcelain for which the city is famed. For a preview of Stoke, check out Arnold Bennett's memorable descriptions of the area in its industrial heyday in his novel *Anna of the Five Towns* (something of a misnomer as Stoke actually consists of six towns).

Orientation

Stoke-on-Trent is made up of Tunstall (Robbie Williams' hometown), Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton, together often called the Potteries. Hanley is the official 'city centre'. Stoke-on-Trent train station is south of Hanley, but buses from outside the main entrance run there in minutes. The bus station is in the centre of Hanley.

Information

Ask at the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 236000; www.visitstoke.co.uk; Victoria Hall, Bagnall St, Hanley; 🕘 9.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat), adjacent to the bus station, for a map with the locations of the various showrooms, factory shops and visitor centres.

Sights & Activities

The **Wedgwood Visitor Centre** (☎ 0870 606 1759; www.thewedgwoodvisitorcentre.com; Barlaston; Mon-Fri £8, Sat & Sun £6; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), set in 80 hectares of attractive parkland, offers a fascinating insight into bone-china production. Tours take in an extensive collection of historic pieces, artisans who deftly paint designs onto china while you watch, and best of all, a troupe of Star Wars–esque anthropomorphic robots churning out perfect plates and mugs. Equally interesting are the film and displays on the life of founder Josiah Wedgwood (1730–95). An innovative potter, he was also a driving force behind the construction of England's canal system and the abolition of slavery.

The **Potteries Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 232323; Bethesda St, Hanley; admission free; 🕘 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) covers the history of the Potteries and houses an impressively extensive ceramics display as well as a fine-art collection (Picasso, Degas).

Constructed around Stoke's last remaining bottle kiln, the wonderfully evocative **Gladstone Pottery Museum** (☎ 319232; Uttoxeter Rd, Longton; adult/child £4.95/3.50; 🕒 10am-5pm) has an authentic working Victorian pottery factory where skilled potters tell visitors about their work. Those of a scatological bent will enjoy the Flushed With Pride exhibition, which charts the story of the toilet from chamber pots and shared privy holes (with smell effects!) to modern hi-tech conveniences. Buses 6 and 6a go to the museum from Hanley.

Getting There & Away

National Express coaches run to/from London (four hours, five daily) and Manchester (1½ hours, eight daily). Trains run to Stafford (20 minutes, every 30 minutes), and hourly to London (1¾ hours).

AROUND STOKE-ON-TRENT

Little Moreton Hall

England's most spectacular black-and-white **timber-framed house** (NT; ☎ 01260-272018; adult/child £5.50/2.80; 🕒 11.30am-5pm Wed-Sun late Mar-Oct, 11.30am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-late Dec) dates back to the 16th century; within its over-the-top exterior there are a series of important wall paintings and an indefinable sense of romance. Little Moreton is off the A34 south of Congleton.

Alton Towers

Deservedly Britain's most popular theme park, **Alton Towers** (☎ 0870 444 4455; www.altontowers.com; adult/under 12yr £29.50/19; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Oct–mid-Mar, longer hours mid-Mar–Sep) is an absolute must for white-knuckle fiends. There are more than 100 rides, including the terrifying vertical drop of the Oblivion, upside-down roller coasters, log flumes and more. Entry prices are almost as steep as the rides and are highest during school holidays.

There's a hotel within the park, but most visitors opt to stay in nearby villages. The park's website features a list of accommodation options. Alton itself is an attractive village with several B&Bs. **Old School House** (☎ 01538-702151; old_school_house@talk21.com; Castle Hill Rd, Alton; d incl breakfast £60) is an exceptional guesthouse in an 1845 listed school building (just over 1 mile from the park) with accommodating hosts. Much more basic is the **Dimmingsdale YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5794; dimmingsdale@yha.org.uk; Oakamoor; dm members/nonmembers £11.95/14.95), 2 miles northwest of the park. There are plenty of good rambles around the hostel too.

Alton Towers is east of Cheadle off the B5032. Public transport is sketchy, but various train companies offer all-in-one packages from London and other cities; check the website for current details.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Beyond its obvious appeal as a batch of pretty villages and winding country lanes, Northamptonshire has special relevance for fans of Princess Diana, footwear and religious eccentrics. Its far-flung attractions also include some historic Saxon churches, honey-coloured historic towns with pretty thatched cottages and stately homes. It's a great region for driving and, as there's no single tourism blockbuster, you don't have to fight the masses to take in its charms.

Orientation & Information

Northamptonshire is roughly 50 miles long and 20 miles wide, running southwest to northeast. The M1 cuts diagonally across the county just below Northampton, which lies in the middle. Attractions are scattered.

For general (but sketchy) information about the county, check the website www.visitnorthamptonshire.co.uk. Otherwise, visit Northampton's tourist office.

Getting Around

Driving is the way to see the most of the county. Turning a corner on a winding country lane and coming across a sleepy village is one of the joys of the region. All the major car-hire companies have branches in Northampton.

Buses do run to most places of interest from Northampton and other nearby towns, but services can be sporadic; some run only a few times daily, so it's best to check times with the operator.

Stagecoach (www.stagecoachbus.com/northants/)
Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608)

NORTHAMPTON

☎ 01604 / pop 194,458

Unassuming Northampton is surprisingly steeped in historical significance. In Saxon days it was perhaps the most important city in England, and Mary Queen of Scots was executed in nearby Fotheringhay. Nowadays, soulless stretches of shopping precincts blight the centre but the town has some buildings of architectural note, and it's a good base for trips around a remarkably pretty county. It's particularly notable for two other things: shoes (factories here used to protect the feet of half the country) and its hideous 1970s bus station, recently voted one of the ugliest buildings in Britain.

Orientation

The town is centred on Market Sq, with the main pedestrianised shopping route, Abington St, running east from it, where it becomes Kettering Rd, with its hotels and bars. To the south of Market Sq is the Guildhall and tourist office. The infamous bus station is to the north.

Information

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 838800; www.northampton.gov.uk/tourism; Guildhall, St Giles Sq; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is within the city's town hall.

Sights & Activities

You don't have to be a shoe fetishist to get a kick out of the impressive displays at **Northampton Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 838111; Guildhall Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). From Turkish stilted clogs to rawhide sandals, the footwear collection is fantastic, varied and vast. There are also some fine paintings and changing special exhibitions.

The **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (☎ 754782; 🕒 noon-4pm Wed, 2-4pm Sat) is Northampton's oldest building at nine centuries and counting. It is also one of the few surviving round churches in the country. Founded after the first earl of Northampton returned from the Crusades in 1100, it is modelled on its Jerusalem namesake.

Sleeping & Eating

Coach House Hotel (☎ 250981; www.thecoachhousenorthampton.com; 10 East Park Pde; s/d incl breakfast from £55/65; 🅿) In an attractive Victorian terrace façade, this family-run hotel (effectively on the Kettering Rd) has reasonable rooms in a fine location opposite parkland.

Lime Trees Hotel (☎ 632188; www.limetreeshotel.co.uk; 8 Langham Pl; s/d from £85/105; 🅿 💻) This welcoming Best Western affiliate is in an attractive Georgian property about half a mile north of the centre. It has a pretty courtyard at the back. Rooms err on the small side, but the restaurant beats most of the town's eating options.

Church Restaurant (☎ 603800; 67-83 Bridge St; mains £12-19; 🕒 noon-2.30pm Tue-Fri, 6pm-11pm Tue-Sat) This upmarket restaurant is merely the latest incarnation of a historic site; previous uses include hospice, church and even train station. Its French cuisine is a rare example of fine dining in Northampton city centre.

Entertainment

Picturedrome (☎ 230777; www.thepicturedrome.com; 222 Kettering Rd) A little way out of town, this is a breath of fresh air after the humdrum chain pubs of the centre. Gilt-edged mirrors are part of the slick décor, which, along with decent food and an easy-going vibe, attracts the more discerning of Northampton's 20-somethings. There are regular comedy nights, live music and other events.

Royal Theatre (☎ 624811; www.northamptontheatres.com; Guildhall Rd) is managed cooperatively along with Derngate. Following a major refurbishment, they were reopened in 2006. Derngate is Northampton's arts centre and hosts anything from Bill Wyman to *Madame Butterfly*. The Royal is an impressive Victorian structure staging local theatre and quality West End productions.

Getting There & Away

Northampton has good rail links with Birmingham (one hour, hourly) and London Euston (one hour, at least every 30 minutes). The train station is about half a mile west of town along Gold St.

National Express coaches run to London (£10.60 single, 2¼ hours, five daily), Nottingham (£10.20, 2½ hours, daily) and Birmingham (£5.70, one hour 40 minutes, two daily). The truly awful Greyfriars bus station is on Lady's Lane, north of the shopping centre.

AROUND NORTHAMPTON

Althorp

Famous as the final resting place of Diana, Princess of Wales, after her life was tragically cut short in a Paris car crash, **Althorp House** (☎ bookings 0870 167 9000; www.althorp.com; adult/child £12/6, plus access to upstairs of house £2.50; 🕒 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, last entry 4pm) had an acclaimed collection of art and books before the world's eyes turned upon it. Diana is commemorated in a memorial and museum in the grounds of her ancestral home. Meanwhile, the slightly forbidding-looking 16th-century mansion contains works by Rubens, Gainsborough and

Van Dyck. Profits from ticket sales go to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund. The limited number of tickets must be booked by phone or on the website. Incidentally, Althorp should be pronounced 'altrup'.

Althorp is off the A428 5.5 miles northwest of Northampton. There are five buses daily (except Sunday) linking Northampton with Althorp, leaving from Greyfriars bus station.

Rushton Triangular Lodge

This mysterious **lodge** (EH; ☎ 01536-710761; adult/child £2.40/1.20; 🕒 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct) with esoteric inscriptions shows the power of Sir Thomas Tresham's Catholic faith. He designed a number of buildings in the area (and was imprisoned more than once for expressing his beliefs). With three of everything, from sides to floors to gables, the lodge is in a magical setting among rapeseed fields and is Tresham's enduring symbol of the trinity. It was built at the end of the 16th century.

The lodge is 4 miles northwest of Kettering. Bus 19 from Kettering stops in Desborough, 2 miles away (20 minutes, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, every two hours on Sunday). Kettering is 15 miles northeast of Northampton along the A43.

Kirby Hall

Once one of the finest Elizabethan mansions, the 'Jewel of the English Renaissance', **Kirby Hall** (EH; ☎ 01536-203230; adult/child £4.50/2.30; 🕒 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar) was begun in 1570, and additions were made up to the 19th century. Abandoned and fallen into disrepair, it's still a remarkable, atmospheric site – it was used as the location for the 1999 film of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* – with fine filigree stonework, ravens cawing in the empty halls and peacocks roaming its restored formal parterre gardens.

Kirby Hall is 4 miles northeast of Corby; Corby is 9 miles north of Kettering along the A43.

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

In typical Midlands fashion, Leicestershire self-deprecatingly plays down its own attractions, yet it boasts several picturesque villages, a rich industrial heritage and a few key historic sites – not to mention magnificent Belvoir Castle. Leicester, meanwhile, is a vibrant multicultural city.

Tiny Rutland was merged with Leicestershire in 1974, but in April 1997 regained its 'independence' as a county. With magnificent Rutland Water and charming settlements, it's a hit with lovers of water sports and quaint villages.

Orientation & Information

Leicestershire and Rutland together look like an upside-down map of Australia. Leicester is virtually bang in the centre of its county, with the M1 motorway running north–south just to the west, dividing the largely industrial towns and National Forest of the west from the more rural east, including Belvoir Castle. To the east of Leicester, Rutland, wedged between four counties, revolves around central Rutland Water.

For general countywide information, contact **Leicestershire Tourism** (☎ 0906 294 1113).

Getting There & Around

Arriva Midlands (www.arrivabus.co.uk) Operates Leicestershire bus services.

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608) Latest timetables, bus routes and numbers.

LEICESTER

☎ 0116 / pop 279,923

Like many Midlands cities, Leicester is no oil painting, but it's still got a lot going for it if you're ready to give it a chance. Pummelled by the Luftwaffe, then knocked sideways by industrial decline, the city has now re-invented itself as vibrant, socially progressive melting pot. Its large student population also ensures a buzzing nightlife. It has a large and vibrant Asian community with many interesting events staged around religious festivals such as Holi, Diwali and Eid-ul-Fitr. The National Space Centre is worth a visit in its own right.

Orientation

For drivers, Leicester is plagued by a maze of one-way streets and forbidden turns. Although there isn't a ring road as such, the A594 does almost a whole circuit and most attractions flank it or are contained within it.

The centre of the Asian community, Belgrave Rd (the 'Golden Mile') is about a mile northeast of the centre. Castle Park, with many of the historic attractions, lies immediately west of the centre.

Information

Ice Mango (☎ 262 6255; www.icemango.co.uk; 4 Market Pl; per hr £2.20; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, noon-5.30pm Sun) Relaxed juice bar with computers for internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 0906 294 1113, calls per min 25p; www.goleicestershire.com; 7-9 Every St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Thu, 10am-5pm Sat)

Sights

JEWRY WALL & MUSEUMS

All Leicester's **museums** (www.leicestermuseums.ac.uk) are free.

Despite its name, **Jewry Wall** is one of England's largest Roman civil structures and has nothing to do with Judaism. You can wander among excavated remains of the Roman public baths, which date back almost two millennia. Notwithstanding its grim external appearance, the **Jewry Wall Museum** (☎ 225 4971; St Nicholas Circle; 🕒 11am-4.30pm Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun Feb-Nov, & some school holidays) contains wonderful Roman mosaics and frescoes, as well as an interactive exhibition 'The Making of Leicester', which tells the history of the city with archaeological reconstructions and paintings.

New Walk Museum & Art Gallery (☎ 225 4900; New Walk; 🕒 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sun) is a child-friendly series of displays on space, materials and art. Adults should get something from the surprisingly varied exhibits too, which range from a Siberian mammoth-ivory paperknife to a life-size portrait of local rugby legend Martin Johnson.

Newarke Houses Museum (☎ 225 4980; The Newarke; 🕒 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sun) is housed in two 16th-century buildings. Revolving around the theme 'ordinary people, extraordinary lives', it charts the life of everyday Leicester residents, and includes reconstructed period shops, and exhibitions on well-known local citizens including Thomas Cook, the package-holiday pioneer.

NATIONAL SPACE CENTRE

This **centre** (☎ 0870 607 7223; www.spacecentre.co.uk; adult/child £11/9; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, plus Mon during Leicester school holidays, last entry 3.30pm) is a spectacular and successful attempt to bring space science to us ordinary mortals. Interactive displays cover cosmic myths, the history of astronomy and the development of space travel; in the Space Now! area you can check on the status of all current space missions. Films in the domed Space Theatre (included in the admission price) launch you to the far reaches of the galaxy, and you can come back to earth with a coffee in Boosters Café. Don't miss the displays on zero-gravity toilets and the amazing germ-devouring underpants.

The centre is off the A6 about 1.5 miles north of the city centre. Take bus 54 from Charles St in the centre.

TEMPLES

Materials were shipped in from India to convert a disused church into a **Jain Centre** (☎ 254 3091; www.jaincentre.com; 32 Oxford St; 🕒 2-5pm Mon-Fri, or by prior arrangement). The building is faced with marble, and the temple – the first Jain temple outside the subcontinent and the only one in Europe – boasts a forest of beautifully carved pillars inside. Jainism evolved in India at around the same time as Buddhism.

Close to the Jewry Wall is the Sikh **Guru Nanak Gurdwara** (☎ 251 7460; 9 Holy Bones; 🕒 1-4pm Thu, 7-8.30pm Sat, 11.30am-1.30pm Sun). There is a small museum, which contains an impressive model of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, and a Sikh/Punjabi heritage exhibition.

Sleeping

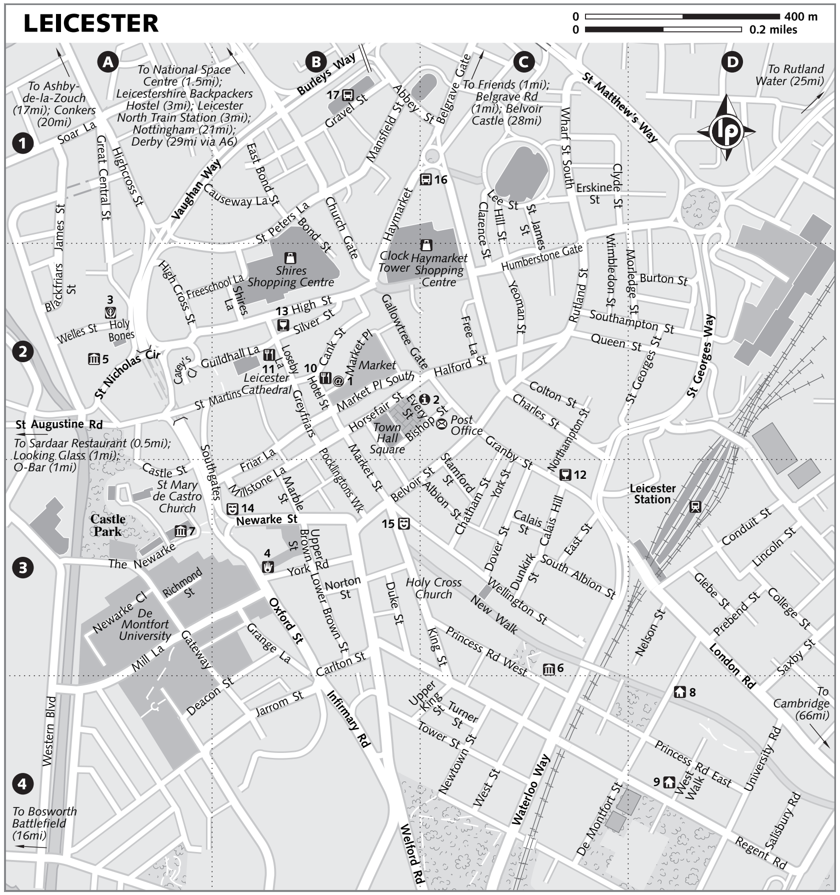
Leicestershire Backpackers Hostel (☎ 267 3107; 157 Wanlip Lane, Birstall; dm incl breakfast per night/week £11/45; Ⓟ) This odd little place 3 miles north of the centre takes under-28 travellers/students only. Cooking is communal, and the breakfast is basic. Don't expect luxury or personal space here. Take bus 70 from Haymarket station or 125 from St Margaret's station to get there.

Spindle Lodge (☎ 233 8801; www.spindlelodge.com; 2 West Walk; s/d from £49/67; Ⓟ 🖥) This charming Victorian town house, now a small family-run hotel, is elegantly furnished, the varnished floors gleam with good care, and the welcome is warm.

Belmont House Hotel (☎ 254 4773; www.belmonthotel.co.uk; De Montfort St; s/d Sun-Thu £110/120, Fri & Sat £70/90; Ⓟ 🖥) In an elongated Georgian building, this hotel has spotless rooms, although the décor is due a face-lift. It is favoured by executives during the week, with some weekend deals available.

Eating

The Golden Mile on Belgrave Rd is located a mile to the north of the centre (take bus 22 from Haymarket bus station) and teems with good Indian and vegetarian restaurants.


LEICESTER
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To Ashby-de-la-Zouch (17mi); Conkers (20mi)
To National Space Centre (1.5mi); Leicestershire Backpackers Hostel (3mi); Leicester North Train Station (3mi); Nottingham (21mi); Derby (29mi via A6)
To Friends (1mi); Belgrave Rd (1mi); Belvoir Castle (28mi)
To Rutland Water (25mi)
To Sardaar Restaurant (0.5mi); Looking Glass (1mi); O-Bar (1mi)
To Cambridge (66mi)
To Bosworth Battlefield (16mi)
Burleys Way
St Matthew's Way
Vaughan Way
St Nicholas Cir
St Georges Way
Oxford St
Infirmary Rd
Waterloo Way
Welford Rd
London Rd
Western Blvd
St Augustine Rd
Newarke St
Shires Shopping Centre
Haymarket Shopping Centre
Clock Tower
Market
Leicester Cathedral
Town Hall Square
Post Office
Leicester Station
Castle Park
St Mary de Castro Church
De Montfort University
Holy Cross Church
Holy Bones
Humberstone Gate
Granby St
Charles St
Belgrave Gate
Gravel St
Church Gate
Highcross St
High St
Silver St
Gallowtree Gate
Halford St
Horsefair St
Market St
Belvoir St
Princess Rd East
Princess Rd West
New Walk
Regent Rd
University Rd
Salisbury Rd
De Montfort St
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Carlton St
Nelson St
Glebe St
Prebend St
College St
Saxby St
Lincoln St
Conduit St
East St
South Albion St
Calais Hill
Calais St
Dover St
Dunkirk St
Wellington St
Chatham St
York St
Albion St
Stamford St
Northampton St
Colton St
Queen St
Southampton St
Burton St
Rutland St
Wimbledon St
Morledge St
Yeoman St
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Clyde St
Wharf St South
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Liquid (☎ 261 9086; 5 Guildhall Lane; toasted baguettes £2.30; 🕑 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, plus Sun Dec) Fresh and friendly with enough juices to satisfy anyone's daily vitamin requirements.

Sardaar Restaurant (☎ 299 3300; 30 Narborough Rd; mains £3-8; 🕑 10am-10pm) Very cheap vegetarian Indian platters are served in this stripped-back diner-style café. Dishes won't do the cholesterol count much good, but the mango lassi–style drink is to die for. It's west of the centre.

Friends (☎ 266 8809; 41-43 Belgrave Rd; mains £6-12; 🕑 noon-2pm Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Chefs from New Delhi proudly prepare authentic North Indian recipes at this mainstay of the Golden Mile, still going strong after more than two decades.

Case (☎ 251 7675; 4-6 Hotel St; mains £8-18 🕑 7-10.30pm Mon-Sat) One of Leicester's finest places to eat out, this is in the unlikely setting of a former suitcase factory. A refined hubbub fills the airy 1st-floor space where exotic influences infuse traditional English recipes. The Champagne Bar downstairs is easier on the wallet.

Opera House (☎ 223 6666; 10 Guildhall Lane; mains £15-19) Located in a very historical building with a colourful history (it used to be a brothel), this classy Leicester restaurant has an excellent chef. Head downstairs for the intimate, atmospheric underground dining area.

Drinking

Amid the rash of chain pubs in the centre, there are a few places for more discerning drinkers. Some great options are away from downtown. Head to Braunstone Gate, Narborough Rd and Hinckley Rd to experience Leicester's vibrant bar and pub scene at its best.

Globe (☎ 262 9819; 43 Silver St; 🕑 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) At last, that rare beast, a traditional old pub (built in 1720) in a city centre where there's no edge to the night-time drinking – just fine draught ales, a warm atmosphere and little alcoves to lose yourself in.

Looking Glass (☎ 255 9002; 68-70 Braunstone Gate; 🕑 3.30pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) If you hadn't sussed it from the name, this is the place to see and be seen on Braunstone Gate. Funky mirror-decked walls, beautiful young things and a basement with decent live acoustic music make this well worth a visit.

O-Bar (☎ 255 8223; 59-61 Braunstone Gate; 🕑 4.30pm-1am Mon-Sat, 3pm-12.30am Sun) A relaxed, unpretentious crowd heads to the colourful, retro-cool of this bar, which gets absolutely packed to the rafters on weekend nights.

Bossa (☎ 255 9551; 110 Granby St; 🕑 11am-10.30pm Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri-Sat) Latin rhythms, cheap, tasty snacks (toasties £1.25) and a relaxed, bohemian crowd populate this pint-sized, gay-friendly bar-café.

Entertainment

Charlotte (☎ 255 3956; www.thecharlotte.co.uk; 8 Oxford St; 🕑 doors open 8pm) Leicester's legendary venue has staged Oasis and the Stone Roses, among others, before they became megastars. With a late licence and club nights, it's grungy, it's lively, it caters for all sorts of musical tastes – and it keeps packing 'em in.

Original Four (☎ 254 1638; 2 King St; admission Sat night £7) Behind a mock-Tudor façade, this place cooks up four floors of diverse beats, from electric tracks to live-music sets. It has seen more popular days but is still one of the best clubbing options in town.

Getting There & Away

National Express operates from St Margaret's bus station on Gravel St, north of the centre. The express bus JL367 runs to Nottingham (one hour, eight daily Monday to Saturday), while the 310 runs to Coventry (45 minutes, four daily). Other options for Coventry include the X67 (one hour, hourly).

Trains run to London St Pancras (1½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Birmingham (one hour, every 30 minutes).

A tourist jaunt rather than a serious transport option, the classic **Great Central Railway** (☎ 01509-230726; www.gcrailway.co.uk; return tickets £12/8) operates steam locomotives between Leicester North station on Redhill Circle and Loughborough Central. This dual-track railway runs the 8-mile route along which Thomas Cook ran his original package tour in 1841. The trains run daily from May to August and every weekend the rest of the year. Take bus 70 from Haymarket bus station.

Getting Around

Central Leicester is easy to get around on foot. As an alternative to local buses, the open-top bus run by **Discover Leicester** (☎ 299 8888; adult/under 15yr £6/4; 🕑 on the hour 10am-4pm Jul-Sep) runs a jump-on, jump-off bus around the city and up to Belgrave Rd, the Great Central Railway and the National Space Centre with commentary from a local expert. It starts by the Thomas Cook statue outside the main train station.

AROUND LEICESTER

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

☎ 01530 / pop 12,758

The real draw of Ashby-de-la-Zouch is its **castle** (☎ 413343; adult/child £3.40/1.70; 🕑 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar). Built in Norman times and owned by the Zouch family until 1399, it was extended in the 14th and 15th centuries and then reduced to its present picturesquely ruined state in 1648 after the Civil War. A lively audio guide introduces the characters and details the history. Bring a torch (flashlight) to explore the underground passageway connecting the tower with the kitchen.

For accommodation, contact the **tourist office** (☎ 411767; North St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat). Ashby is on the A511 about 15 miles northwest of Leicester. Buses 117 and 118 (218 Sunday) run hourly from St Margaret's bus station in Leicester.

Belvoir Castle

In the wilds of the county is **Belvoir Castle** (☎ 01476-870262; www.belvoircastle.com; adult/child £10/5; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun May-Sep, Sun Apr & Oct), a magnificent baroque and Gothic fantasy rebuilt in the 19th century after suffering serious damage during the Civil War. It is also home to the duke and duchess of Rutland. Much of the sumptuous interior is open to the public, and collections of weaponry, medals and art (including pieces by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Holbein) are highlights. There are marvellous views across the countryside, and peacocks roam the delightful gardens.

Belvoir (*bee*-ver) is 6 miles west of Grantham, off the A1; Grantham is about 25 miles east of Nottingham along the A52.

RUTLAND

Rutland's motto 'Multum in Parvo' (so much in so little' refers to its status as England's smallest county. Rutland Water, one of the largest reservoirs in Europe, makes it a haven for water-sport lovers, as well as climbers and bird-watchers.

Information

Oakham tourist office (☎ 01572-758441; Catmose St, Oakham; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun) Housed in the Rutland County Museum.

Rutland Water tourist office (☎ 01572-653026; Sykes Lane, Empingham; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, shorter hours in winter)

Sights & Activities

In Rutland Water, the **Rutland Belle** (☎ 01572-787630; www.rutlandwatercruises.com; the Harbour, Whitwell Park; adult/child £6/4) offers pleasure cruises every afternoon, May to September.

The **Watersports Centre** (☎ 01780-460154; Whitwell) organises windsurfing, canoeing and sailing and offers tuition. **Rutland Sailing School** (☎ 01780-721999; www.rutlandsailingschool.co.uk; Edith Weston) offers tuition to sailors of all abilities, from catamarans to dinghies.

For bike hire contact **Rutland Water Cycling** (☎ 01780-460705; www.rutlandcycling.co.uk; Whitwell Car Park).

The sleepy county town of **Oakham** has a famous school and **Oakham Castle** (admission free; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun, shorter hours Nov-Feb), where an impressive Great Hall from a 12th-century Norman structure still stands.

South of Oakham is the village of Lyddington, home to the **Bede House** (EH; ☎ 01572-822438; adult/child £3.30/1.70; 🕒 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Sep). Originally a wing of the medieval rural palace of the bishops of Lincoln, it was converted into almshouses in 1600. Look out for the beautifully carved cornice in the Great Chamber.

Getting There & Away

Bus 19 runs from Nottingham's Broadmarsh bus station to Oakham (1¼ hours, hourly). Trains run hourly from Leicester, Peterborough and Birmingham.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Nottinghamshire seems to breed good stories: this is the land of the legendary Robin Hood and his merry men, and the home of provocative writer DH Lawrence and decadent bad-boy poet Lord Byron. Even its castles and pubs are draped in myth and mystery. The city of Nottingham is a vibrant hub of business, shopping and clubbing, while the surrounding countryside is dotted with the occasional gem of a stately home.

Orientation & Information

Nottinghamshire is tall and thin, spreading a surprising distance north of Nottingham to finish level with Sheffield. Most of the county's attractions are in the southern half, including Nottingham, with Newstead and Eastwood just north, Sherwood Forest in the centre and Newark-on-Trent and Southwell to the east.

Find countywide information at www.visitnottingham.co.uk.

Getting Around

A journey planner and comprehensive bus, rail, tram and plane information can be found at www.itsnottingham.info. **Sherwood Forester buses** (☎ 0115-977 4268; Ranger ticket adult/child £6/3; 🕒 Sun & Bank Holidays Jun-Aug) go to tourist attractions all over Nottinghamshire; some offer admission discounts if you show the ticket.

NOTTINGHAM

☎ 0115 / pop 266,988

Linked forever to Robin Hood and his merry band of men in Lincoln green, Nottingham today is a dynamic mix of medieval and modern. Amid multistorey car parks and who-cares-what-you-think architectural eyesores, you'll stumble upon a centuries-old landmark that crusaders probably knew – it's that kind of place. Transformed by the riches of the 19th-century lace industry, the city developed into a powerful manufacturing engine-room, churning out Raleigh bikes, the Boots pharmacy empire and cigarettes. Industry has since declined, but the nightlife, culture and shopping most definitely have not. The city boasts fashion designer Paul Smith as one of its own, while the clubs and bars are some of the liveliest in the country. Trent Bridge is a major draw for cricket fans, and the reds of Nottingham Forest football club have an impressive heritage that belies their current form.

Orientation

Like other Midlands cities, Nottingham is enclosed by an inner ring road within which lie most of the attractions, bars and restaurants. The train station is on the southern edge of the centre. There are two bus stations: Victoria bus station is hidden away behind the Victoria shopping centre, just north of the centre, while Broadmarsh bus station is beneath Broadmarsh shopping centre to the south.

Information

Combat Strike (☎ 988 1880; 2nd fl, the Cornerhouse, Forman St; per hr £3; 🕒 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, to late Fri-Sun) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 915 5330; www.visitnottingham.com; 1-4 Smithy Row; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Very helpful. Ask about discount combination tickets for major attractions.

Sights & Activities

NOTTINGHAM CASTLE MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

More of a mansion than a castle, the stately building here now has been standing since the 1670s. The last Nottingham Castle was demolished after the Civil War, while the original was put up by William the Conqueror. The castle **museum** (☎ 915 3700; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat-Thu Nov-Feb) opened in 1878. It vividly sets out Nottingham's history and displays some of the medieval alabaster carvings for which Nottingham was noted. Textiles and costumes peculiar to the city are also on show. Upstairs there's an art gallery with changing exhibitions and some fine permanent pieces (including works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti). There's a stylish café and an excellent shop.

An underground passageway, **Mortimer's Hole** (45min tours £2; 🕒 tours 11am, 2pm & 3pm Mon-Thu, 2pm & 3pm Fri & Sat), leads from the castle to Brewhouse Yard. Roger Mortimer, who arranged Edward II's murder, is said to have been captured by supporters of Edward III who entered via this passage. Ask to see the Sheriff Room (there is still a Sheriff of Nottingham today, a purely symbolic role).

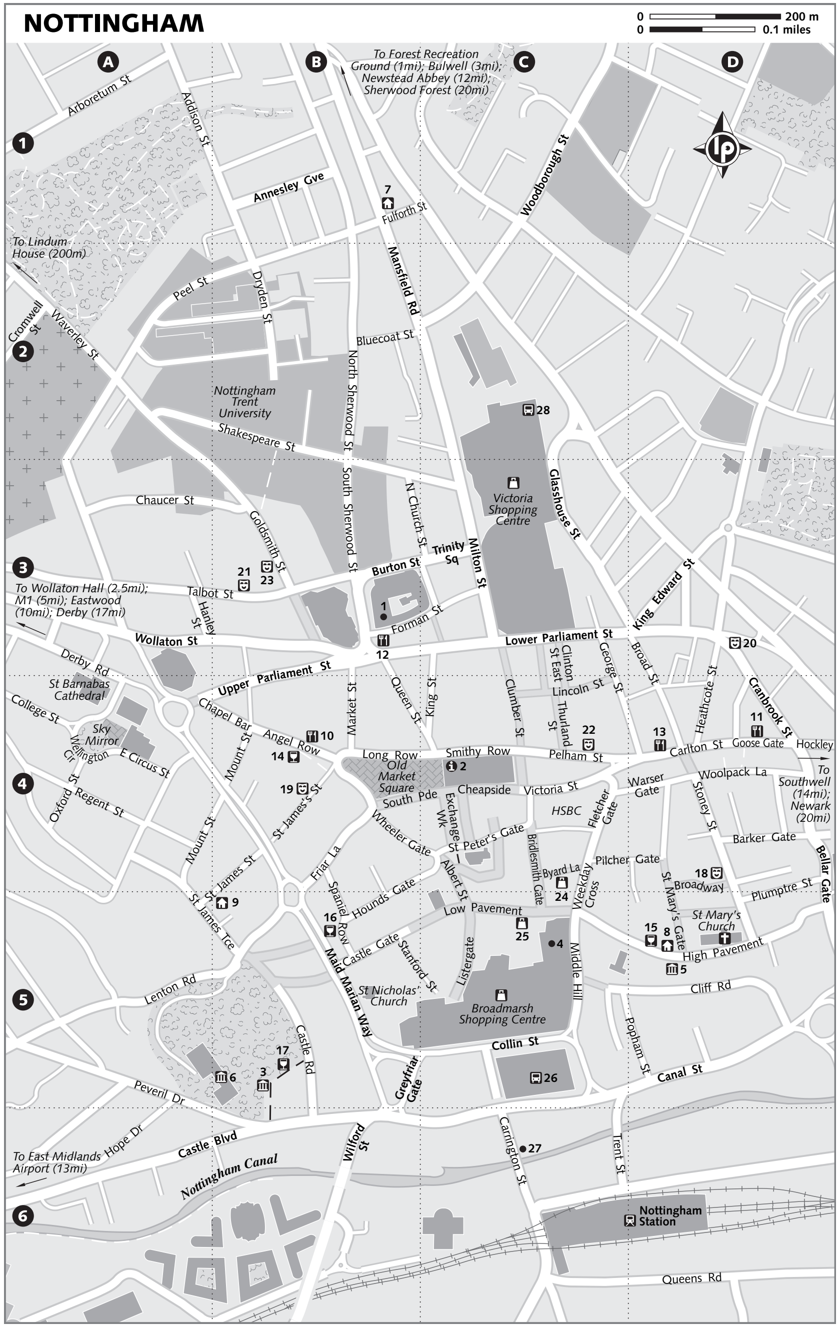
CAVES OF NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham stands on Sherwood sandstone riddled with manmade caves that date back to medieval times. Bizarrely, the entrance to the most fascinating, readily accessible **caves** (☎ 924 1424; www.cityofcaves.com; admission £3.75; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) is inside Broadmarsh shopping centre, on the upper level. These contain an air-raid shelter, a medieval underground tannery, several pub cellars and a mock-up of a Victorian slum dwelling.

WOLLATON HALL

Built in 1588 by Sir Francis Willoughby, land and coal-mine owner, **Wollaton Hall** (☎ 915 3900; Wollaton Park, Derby Rd; admission free Mon-Fri, adult/child Sat & Sun £1.50/1; 🕒 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) is a magnificent example of Elizabethan architecture at its most extravagant. Architect Robert Smythson was also responsible for the equally avant-garde Longleat in Wessex. It was undergoing restoration works at the time of research; call ahead to check opening hours. The hall also houses a mediocre natural-history museum.

The **Industrial Museum** (admission free Mon-Fri, adult/child Sat & Sun £1.50/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct), in the 18th-century stable block, displays lace-making equipment, Raleigh bicycles, a gigantic 1858 beam engine and oddities such as a locally invented, 1963 video recorder that never got off the ground.



NOTTINGHAM

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To Forest Recreation Ground (1mi); Bulwell (3mi); Newstead Abbey (12mi); Sherwood Forest (20mi)
Arboretum St
Addison St
Annesley Gve
Fulforth St
Woodborough St
To Lindum House (200m)
Peel St
Dryden St
Mansfield Rd
Cromwell St
Waverley St
Bluecoat St
Nottingham Trent University
North Sherwood St
Shakespeare St
South Sherwood St
Chaucer St
Goldsmith St
N Church St
Victoria Shopping Centre
Glasshouse St
Trinity Sq
Milton St
Burton St
To Wollaton Hall (2.5mi); M1 (5mi); Eastwood (10mi); Derby (17mi)
Talbot St
Hanley St
Forman St
King Edward St
Lower Parliament St
Wollaton St
Derby Rd
St Barnabas Cathedral
Upper Parliament St
Clinton St East
George St
Broad St
Lincoln St
Thurland St
Heathcote St
Cranbrook St
College St
Sky Mirror
Wellington Cir
E Circus St
Chapel Bar
Angel Row
Market St
Queen St
King St
Clumber St
Long Row
Old Market Square
South Pde
Smithy Row
Pelham St
Carlton St
Goose Gate
Hockley
To Southwell (14mi); Newark (20mi)
Oxford St
Regent St
Mount St
St James's St
Wheeler Gate
Exchange Wk
Cheapside
Victoria St
HSBC
Warser Gate
Fletcher Gate
Woolpack La
Stoney St
Barker Gate
St Peter's Gate
Bridlesmith Gate
Byard La
Weekday Cross
Pilcher Gate
Broadway
St Mary's Gate
Plumptre St
Bellar Gate
Friar La
St James St
St James Tce
Spaniel Row
Hounds Gate
Albert St
Low Pavement
Middle Hill
St Mary's Church
High Pavement
Maid Marian Way
Castle Gate
Stanford St
St Nicholas' Church
Listergate
Broadmarsh Shopping Centre
Cliff Rd
Lenton Rd
Castle Rd
Collin St
Popham St
Canal St
Greyfriar Gate
Peveril Dr
Wilford St
Carrington St
Trent St
To East Midlands Airport (13mi)
Hope Dr
Castle Blvd
Nottingham Canal
Nottingham Station
Queens Rd
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Wollaton Hall is on the western edge of the city, 2.5 miles from the centre; get there on bus 30, which stops right in front (£1.30, 15 minutes). Wollaton Park, surrounding the hall, is a popular picnic spot.

BREWHOUSE YARD MUSEUM

Housed in five 17th-century cottages carved into the cliff below the castle, this engaging **museum** (☎ 915 3600; Castle Blvd; admission Mon-Fri free, Sat & Sun £1.50; 🕙 10am-4.30pm) re-creates everyday life in Nottingham over the past 300 years with particularly fine reconstructions of traditional shops.

GALLERIES OF JUSTICE

In the impressive Shire Hall building, the well-presented **Galleries of Justice** (☎ 952 0555; www.galleriesofjustice.org.uk; High Pavement; adult/child £7.95/5.95; 🕙 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) takes you through an interactive history of the judicial system. From medieval ordeals by water or hot iron to modern crime detection, 'gaolers' and 'prisoners' guide you through. Careful, you may find yourself sentenced to death in a Victorian courtroom!

Tours

Nottingham Tours (☎ 925 9388; www.nottinghamtours.com) Offers a well-respected walking tour of the city, as well as tours of Sherwood Forest and boat trips.

Original Nottingham Ghost Walk (☎ 01773-769300; www.ghost-walks.co.uk; adult/child £4/3; 🕙 tours 7pm Sat Jan-Nov) Departs from Ye Olde Salutation Inn (p438) to delve into the city's supernatural past – descend into the medieval caves if you dare...

Festivals & Events

A **Shakespeare Festival** has been held each July for almost a decade at the **Nottingham Playhouse** (☎ 941 9419; www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk; Wellington Circus). Meanwhile, the Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery (p435) plays host to a **Robin Hood Pageant**, in October each year, reliving the times of the local outlaw legend.

The city's famed **Goose Fair** dates back to the Middle Ages. These days it's an outsized funfair that takes place around the beginning of October in the Forest Recreation Ground, a mile north of the city centre.

Sleeping

Igloo Backpackers Hostel (☎ 947 5250; www.igloohostel.co.uk; 110 Mansfield Rd; dm £13.50) Easy-come, easy-go budget travellers' favourite, this basic 36-bed independent hostel is a short walk north of Victoria bus station. The entrance is on Fulforth St. It's always full at weekends so book ahead. Breakfast is extra.

Lindum House (☎ 847 1089; 1 Burns St; s/d incl breakfast £40/50) On the outskirts of the centre in a striking Gothic residence, this is a quirky option and a good one for self-caterers: two of the rooms have adjoining kitchens. Beware of steep cancellation policy of 72 hours in advance. It's about 10 minutes' walk northwest from the centre.

Rutland Square Hotel (☎ 941 1114; rutlandsquare@zoffanyhotels.co.uk; St James St; s/d from £85/120) The rooms at this central business hotel are clean and serviceable, but the overall feel is clinical with little personal touch or charm. But there are good weekend discounts.

Lace Market Hotel (☎ 852 3232; www.lacemarkethotel.co.uk; 29-31 High Pavement; s/d £90/115; P 🚭) Nottingham's best place to stay by a country mile, this is a lovely boutique hotel in a beautifully historic, well-heeled pocket of the city centre. It's in an old town house with a slick contemporary interior and young, attentive staff. Check the website for weekend discounts.

Eating

Alley Café (☎ 955 1013; 19 Cannon Court; mains £6-9; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon & Tue, to 11pm Wed-Sat) This pint-sized café-bar has created quite a buzz with its excellent, globally inspired vegetarian and vegan dishes, not to mention its funky DJs and tunes. It is hidden down an ancient back alley. Seek it out.

Skinny Sumo (☎ 952 0188; 11-13 Carlton St; sushi platters from £8, lunch menu £6.90; 🕒 noon-3pm & 6-11pm Tue-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-3pm & 6-10pm Sun) Frills are sparse, but taste is plenty in this basic, highly regarded white-tiled Japanese café-restaurant with a sushi-bar conveyor belt.

Punchinello (☎ 941 1965; 35 Forman St; mains £8-13; 🕒 noon-3pm Mon-Sat, plus 7.30-10pm Mon-Thu, 7.30-10.30pm Fri & Sat) Low-slung beamed ceilings distinguish this established central restaurant, the oldest in town, but it has moved with the times with a hint of the Mediterranean infusing most of its dishes.

Fresh (☎ 924 3336; 15 Goose Gate; dinner mains £9-12; 🕒 8am-late Mon-Fri, 9am-late Sat) The downstairs eatery specialises in wholesome snacks, salads and sandwiches, while the thriving upstairs restaurant fuses culinary influences from such diverse sources as Thailand and the Mediterranean. Beautiful lilies deck the tables and brighten the surroundings.

Drinking

Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem (☎ 947 3171; Brewhouse Yard, Castle Rd) Tucked into the cliff below the castle, this fantastically atmospheric alehouse claims to be England's oldest pub; it supposedly slaked the thirst of departing crusaders. The phrase 'nooks and crannies' could have been invented for here. Just when you think there are no more, you'll find another – and there are usually more than enough to accommodate the many tourists who come to sample the brews.

Cock & Hoop (☎ 852 3217; 25 High Pavement) Sophisticated yet easy-going, this cosy, traditional refurbished alehouse in a well-heeled pocket of Nottingham is a most pleasant place for a knees-up.

Bell Inn (☎ 947 5241; 18 Angel Row) Another must for the history buffs, this atmospheric old coaching inn lies at the heart of the shopping district and has warmed the cockles of Nottingham drinkers for hundreds of years.

Ye Olde Salutation Inn (☎ 988 1948; Maid Marian Way) A dual carriageway disguises the centuries-old atmosphere (c 1240) of 'the Sal', as regulars know it. Ask at the bar if you can have a peek at the labyrinth of underground caves spiralling down behind an innocuous-looking door.

Entertainment

Nightclub fads come and go at breakneck speed in Nottingham. The converted warehouse/nightclubs on Lace Market's Broadway are still a hub, but the beats could soon move on – and there are plenty of great nights elsewhere. Check the local guides for more.

Stealth (☎ 958 0672; www.stealthattack.co.uk; Masonic Pl, Goldsmith St; admission £2-10) The bold new thing on the Nottingham nightclub scene, Stealth has an eclectic music mix, from indie to highly charged dance all-nighters that lures an up-for-it crowd from miles around.

NG1 (☎ 958 8440; www.ng1club.co.uk; 76-80 Lower Parliament St; admission £2-7) Nottingham's very own gay superclub, NG1 is pure, unpretentious hedonistic fun, with two dance floors belting out classic funky house, pop, cheese or indie depending on the night.

Social (☎ 950 5078; 23 Pelham St) Techno-/dance-heads make for this sister club of the famous London venue. DJs rock the upstairs dance floor.

Bluu (☎ 950 5359; 5 Broadway; 🕒 11am-midnight Sun-Tue, to 1am Wed & Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) This part restaurant, part bar, part nightclub offers a swish menu by day (slow braised lamb hotpot £15.50), and a jumping downstairs bar by night, attracting a chic, shirted and high-heeled crowd mostly in their mid-20s.

Malt Cross (☎ 941 1048; 16 St James St) What a great place! In an old music hall with a colourful history (it was a brothel in a previous incarnation), this has got the best vibe in town. Good live music and decent food are all dished up under the glass arched roof, an architectural treasure in itself.

Rock City (☎ 941 2544; www.rock-city.co.uk; 8 Talbot St) The dance floor jumps here on the popular 'Tuned' student night on Thursday, and on '80s night every Friday. Big-name pop acts usually head here.

Shopping

Paul Smith is the local boy made good in the heady environment of the London fashion scene. He's done so well, he has not one, but two upmarket exclusive shops in the city centre. One is on Byard Lane, the other is Willoughby House.

Getting There & Away

Nottingham is well situated for both trains and buses. The train station just to the south of the town centre has frequent – but no fast – services that go Birmingham (1½ hours), and Manchester (two hours) and London (two hours). Coaches are the cheaper option, mostly operating from the dingy confines of Broadmarsh bus station. There are five direct services to Birmingham and around 10 to London. Bus services to outlying villages are regular and reliable too. Services to Southwell, Eastwood and Newark also mostly depart from Broadmarsh bus station. If you're going further, the nearby airport might be your best bet.

Central Trains (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.centraltrains.co.uk) Links up to Liverpool to the northwest, and as far south as Stansted Airport.

East Midlands Airport (☎ 0871 919 9000; www.nottinghamema.com)

Midland Mainline (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.midlandmainline.com) Serves East Midlands, London, and goes up north too.

Trent Barton (☎ 01773-712265; www.trentbuses.co.uk) Buses depart from Broadmarsh and Victoria bus stations.

Getting Around

For information on buses within Nottingham, call **Nottingham City Transport** (☎ 950 6070; www.nctx.co.uk). The Kangaroo ticket gives you unlimited travel on buses and trams within the city for £2.70.

The city **tram system** (www.thetram.net; single/all day from £1.20/2.20) runs to the centre from Hucknall, 7 miles to the north of central Nottingham, through to the town centre and the train station.

Full details on Nottingham transport can be found at the **Nottingham Travelwise Service** (www.itsnottingham.info). You can also pick up a free transport planner and map from the tourist office.

Bunneys Bikes (☎ 947 2713; 97 Carrington St; bike hire per day £8.99; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) is near the train station.

AROUND NOTTINGHAM

Newstead Abbey

With its attractive gardens, evocative lakeside ruins and notable connections with Romantic poet Lord Byron (1788–1824), whose country pile it was, **Newstead Abbey** (☎ 01623-455900; www.newsteadabbey.org.uk; adult/child £6/3, gardens only £3/1.50; 🕒 house noon-5pm Apr-Sep, garden 9am-dusk year-round) is a popular weekend destination for tourists and local families alike. Founded as an Augustinian priory around 1170, it was converted into a home after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. Beside the still-imposing façade of the priory church are the remains of the manor. It now houses some interesting Byron memorabilia, from pistols to manuscripts, and you can have a peek at the poet's old living quarters. Many of the rooms are re-created in convincing period styles.

The house is 12 miles north of Nottingham, off the A60. The Stagecoach bus 233 runs at 23 minutes past the hour from Victoria bus station, weekends only. The Sherwood Forester bus runs right there on Sunday in summer. Bus 737 runs from Nottingham (25 minutes, every 30 minutes, hourly Sunday) to the abbey gates, where you will have to walk a mile to the house and gardens.

DH Lawrence Sites

The **DH Lawrence Birthplace Museum** (☎ 01773-717353; 8a Victoria St, Eastwood; admission Mon-Fri free, Sat & Sun £2; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), former home of Nottingham's controversial author (1885–1930), has been reconstructed as it would have been in Lawrence's childhood, with period furnishings. Down the road, the **Durban House Heritage Centre** (☎ 01773-717353; Mansfield Rd; admission £2, joint ticket £3.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) sheds light on the background to Lawrence's books by re-creating the life of the mining community at the turn of the 20th century.

Eastwood is about 10 miles northwest of the city. Take Trent Barton service 1.

Sherwood Forest Country Park

Don't expect to lose yourself like an outlaw: there are almost more tourists than trees in today's Sherwood Forest, although there are still peaceful spots to be found. The **Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre** (☎ 01623-823202; www.sherwoodforest.org.uk; admission free, parking £3; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) houses 'Robyn Hode's Sherwode', a cute but corny exhibition describing the lifestyles of bandits, kings, peasants and friars. One of the major attractions is the Major Oak, which is supposed to have been a hiding place for Mr Hood; these days it's more likely he'd have to hold it up, not hide in it. The **Robin Hood Festival** is a massive medieval re-enactment that takes place here every August.

Sherwood Forest YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6026; sherwood@yha.org.uk; Forest Corner, Edwinstowe; dm members/nonmembers £15.50/18.50) is a modern hostel with comfortable dorms just a bugle-horn cry away from the visitor centre.

Sherwood Forester buses run the 20 miles to the park from Nottingham on Sunday. Catch bus 33 from Nottingham Monday to Saturday.

SOUTHWELL

☎ 01636 / pop 6285

Like it fell out of a Jane Austen novel, Southwell is a sleepy market town with tearooms and antique shops. **Southwell Minster** (☎ 812649; suggested donation £2; 🕑 8am-7pm May-Sep, to dusk Oct-Apr) is a Gothic cathedral unlike any other in England, its two heavy, square front towers belying the treats within. The nave dates from the 12th century, although there is evidence of an earlier Saxon church floor, itself made with mosaics from a Roman villa. A highlight of the building is the chapterhouse, filled with 13th-century carvings of leaves, pigs, dogs and rabbits. The library is also fascinating, with illuminated manuscripts and heavy tomes from the 16th century and earlier.

A visit to **Southwell Workhouse** (NT; ☎ 817250; Upton Rd; adult/child £4.90/2.40; 🕑 noon-5pm Thu-Mon Mar-Jul, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Aug) is a sobering but fascinating experience. An audio guide, narrated by 'inmates' and 'officials', describes the life of paupers in the mid-19th century to good (if grim) effect, despite the fact that most of the rooms are empty.

Bus 100 runs from Nottingham (40 minutes, every 20 minutes, hourly on Sunday) and on to Newark-on-Trent (25 minutes, hourly, every two hours on Sunday).

DERBYSHIRE

Without doubt one of the prettiest parts of England, Derbyshire is a winning combination of rolling green hills dotted with lambs and lined with stone fences, beautiful wild moors, remote windswept farms and greystone villages. And, er, Derby.

Part of the county is within the Peak District National Park, and for many visitors the two areas are synonymous – although the park overlaps several other counties, and there are parts of Derbyshire beyond the national park boundary that contain many other attractions. There's the misplaced seaside resort of Matlock Bath, the twisted spire of Chesterfield cathedral, and some wonderful stately homes including dishevelled Calke Abbey and unforgettable Chatsworth.

Derbyshire is one of the most visited counties in England, and justifiably so.

Orientation

Derbyshire's main city, Derby, lies towards the south of this very pretty county, which stretches much taller than it does wide. The north contains some of the prettiest stretches of the Peak District, but south is also blessed with some fine scenery, perhaps most instantly accessible from the pretty market town of Ashbourne. Matlock Bath is almost plumb in the county's centre.

Activities

Outdoor activities in Derbyshire include walking, cycling, rock climbing, caving and paragliding, to name but a few. Many take place inside the Peak District National Park, and are covered under the Activities heading in that section (p446).

Getting There & Around

Derbyshire Wayfarer (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.derbysbus.net; day pass adult/family £7.90/12.50) Covers buses and trains throughout the county and beyond (eg to Manchester and Sheffield).

Trent Barton Buses (☎ 01773-712265; www.trentbuses.co.uk; day ticket £4) Operates the TransPeak bus service.

DERBY

☎ 01332 / pop 229,407

The Industrial Revolution made a major manufacturing centre out of Derby, which made its name churning out such varied goods as silk, china, railways and Rolls-Royce aircraft engines. Not the prettiest town, it is a useful stepping stone to some lovely Derbyshire countryside. And while you're here you can delve into the history of English engineering, the bone-china industry and sample a pint in a city that residents claim to be the real-ale capital of Britain. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 255802; www.visitderby.co.uk; Market Pl; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun) is in the main square.

Sights

Derby's grand 18th-century **cathedral** (Queen St; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕑 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) boasts a 64m-high tower and impressive wrought-iron screens. Large windows enhance the magnificent light interior. Tours run at 10.30am on the second Monday of the month. Don't miss the huge tomb of Bess of Hardwick, one of Derbyshire's most formidable residents in days gone by. For more about her, see Hardwick Hall (p444). Bird-lovers should watch out for peregrines, regularly spotted around the tower.

Next to the River Derwent in a former silk mill (Britain's first 'modern' factory), the **Derby Museum of Industry & History** (☎ 255308; Silk Mill Lane; admission free; 🕑 11am-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun & Bank Holidays) tells the city's manufacturing history; trainspotters will have a field day, while plane buffs should get a buzz out of displays on the development of the Rolls-Royce aero-engine.

The factory of **Royal Crown Derby** (☎ 712841; www.royalcrownderby.co.uk; Osmaston Rd; tours £4.95, demonstration studio only £2.95/2.75; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun, 4 tours daily Mon-Fri) turns out some of the finest bone china in Britain. In the demonstration studio, you'll see workers skilfully making delicate china flowers, using little more than a hatpin, spoon handle and even a head-lice comb. There's also a shop (watch your elbows).

Sleeping

Crompton Coach House (☎ 365735; www.coachhousederby.co.uk; 45 Crompton St; s/d incl breakfast £28.50/55) Bright sunny rooms along with cheery hosts in this colourful B&B make this the best option in a city short on choices for the cash-conscious traveller. It lies just south of the central shopping area.

Midland Hotel (☎ 345894; www.midland-derby.co.uk; Midland Rd; s/d £99/117; 🅿 💻) The grand old dame of Derby hotels lies right opposite the train station. Business delegates hobnob in its welcoming and convivial environs during the week. Prices tumble at the weekends. Ask for an interior room away from traffic noise. The hotel restaurant is good and particularly popular for Sunday lunch.

Eating & Drinking

Derby's best pubs are near the train station.

Café B (☎ 368822; Sadler Gate; bagels £2.50; 🕑 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat, 11.30am-4.30pm Sun) On the narrow pedestrian street branching out from central Market Pl, this place is busy, bright and bustling (to use 'b' words). It's also 'boxlike' and you'll need to scrap for space to munch very tasty bagels.

Haus (☎ 832926; Jacobean House; mains £9-15; 🕑 6-10pm Tue-Sat) The restaurant of the moment, Haus has excellent European cuisine and a fresh, contemporary look. Book ahead at weekends.

Brunswick Inn (☎ 290677; 1 Railway Tce) This award-winning inn has a warm ambience, all maroon leather upholstery and wood panels, but the real reason to come here is the beers (some made on-site), which are a wet dream for real-ale-lovers.

Getting There & Away

Derby's main bus station is currently closed, with temporary stands in place nearby. TransPeak buses run every two hours between Nottingham and Manchester via Derby, Matlock, Bakewell and Buxton (Derby to Nottingham 30 minutes, Derby to Bakewell one hour). Outgoing services currently leave from stand Y1 on Derwent St just north of the tourist office. From London, there are trains to Derby (two hours, hourly), continuing to Chesterfield, Sheffield and Leeds. There is also a direct service from Birmingham (45 minutes).

AROUND DERBY

Kedleston Hall

Sitting proudly in vast landscaped parkland, the superb neoclassical mansion of **Kedleston Hall** (NT; ☎ 01332-842191; adult/child £6.90/3.30; 🕑 noon-4pm Sat-Wed Easter-Oct) is a must for fans of stately homes. The Curzon family has lived here since the 12th century; Sir Nathaniel Curzon tore down an earlier house in 1758 so this stunning masterpiece could be built. Meanwhile, the poor old peasants in Kedleston village had their humble dwellings moved a mile down the road, as they interfered with the view! Ah, the good old days…

Entering the house through a grand portico you reach the breathtaking Marble Hall with its massive alabaster columns and statues of Greek deities. Curved corridors on either side offer splendid views of the park – don't miss the arc of floorboards, specially cut from bending oak boughs. Other highlights include richly decorated bedrooms and a circular saloon with a domed roof, modelled on the Pantheon in Rome. Another great building, Government House in Calcutta (now Raj Bhavan), was modelled on Kedleston Hall, as a later Lord Curzon was viceroy of India around 1900. His collection of oriental artefacts is on show, as is his wife's 'peacock' dress – made of gold and silver thread and weighing 5kg.

If the sun is out, take a walk around the lovingly restored 18th-century-style pleasure gardens.

Kedleston Hall is 5 miles northwest of Derby. By bus, service 109 between Derby and Ashbourne goes within about 1.5 miles of Kedleston Hall (20 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday). It leaves from Albert St in Derby, stand B1. On Sunday and Bank Holidays the bus loops right up to the house.

Calke Abbey

Like an enormous, long-neglected cabinet of wonders, **Calke Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01332-863822; adult/child £6.80/3.40; 🕒 12.30-4.30pm Sat-Wed Apr-Oct) is not your usual glitzy, wealth-encrusted stately home. Built around 1703, it's been passed down a dynasty of eccentric and reclusive baronets. Very little has changed since about 1880 – it's a mesmerising example of a country house in decline. The result is a ramshackle maze of secret corridors, underground tunnels and rooms crammed with old furniture, mounted animal heads, dusty books, stuffed birds and endless piles of bric-a-brac from the last three centuries. Some rooms are in fabulous condition, while others are deliberately untouched, complete with crumbling plaster and mouldy wallpaper. (You exit the house via a long, dark tunnel – a bit more thrilling than one might like, given the state of the buildings.) A stroll round the gardens is a similar time-warp experience – in the potting sheds nothing has changed since about 1930, but it looks like the gardener left only yesterday.

Admission to Calke Abbey house is by timed ticket at busy times. On summer weekends it's wise to phone ahead and check there'll be space. You can enter the gardens and grounds at any time. Calke is 10 miles south of Derby. Visitors coming by car must enter via the village of Ticknall. The Arriva bus 68 from Derby to Swadlincote stops at Ticknall (40 minutes, hourly, change to the 69 in Melbourne) and from there it's a 2-mile walk through the park.

Ashbourne

☎ 01335 / pop 7600

The picturesque little market town of Ashbourne is nestled in a bowl formed by the Derbyshire Dales. It lies at the very southern tip of the Peak District National Park, about 15 miles northwest of Derby. Fine stone terraces line Market Pl and the precariously sloping main street, where visitors flock at weekends, either to recharge after a hike or to simply hang out in the flurry of cafés, pubs and antique shops.

The **tourist office** (☎ 343666; Market Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) can provide leaflets or advice on B&Bs in the area.

Of particular interest to walkers and cyclists, Ashbourne is the southern terminus of the **Tissington Trail**, a former railway line and now a wonderful easy-gradient path cutting through fine west Derbyshire countryside. The Tissington Trail takes you north towards Buxton and connects with the High Peak Trail running south towards Matlock Bath; for more details on circular route possibilities see p446). About a mile outside town along Mapleton Lane, **Ashbourne Cycle Hire** (☎ 343156; cycle hire per day £13) is on the Tissington Trail, with a huge stock of bikes and trailers for all ages, and free leaflets showing the route with pubs and teashops along the way.

Ivy-covered **Bramhall's** (☎ 346158; www.bramhalls.co.uk; 6 Buxton Rd; s/d £27.50/55) lies just up the road from the main market square. Its fine restaurant is known well beyond Ashbourne and it also has a great little B&B.

The half-timbered **Ashbourne Gingerbread Shop** (☎ 346753; St John's St) takes the biscuit as the best bakery and tearoom in town. It serves some of the gingerbread Ashbourne is famous for. Down-to-earth **Smith's Tavern** (☎ 342264; 36 St John's St) is a cosy, cluttered and popular pub with decent brews and good grub.

Without your own transport, bus is the only way to get to Ashbourne. Numerous services leave from the forecourt of Derby train station and the trip takes from 40 minutes to just under an hour. Direct buses include the 109 (five services daily Monday to Saturday) and 108 (four per day on Sunday and Bank Holidays). The One, operated by Trent Barton, leaves from Derby's Albert St, stand B1 (four daily Monday to Saturday).

MATLOCK BATH

☎ 01629 / pop 2202

Charming, tacky and quirky in a uniquely British way, Matlock Bath is like a seaside resort that got lost in landlocked rural Derbyshire. Day-trippers wander down the brash promenade, popping into amusement arcades, an aquarium, Victorian cafés, pubs and the souvenir shops – some with stock that seems left over from Victorian times. The tiny tourist beauty spot lies on the southeastern edge of the Peak District National Park. Bisected by the smooth, twisty A6, the town's buzz becomes a roar (of engines) at the weekend, as hundreds of motorcyclists flock here. If you're lucky, you may catch the memorable sight of a leather-clad burly biker sipping tea from a bone-china mug.

It sits next to the pleasant town of Matlock, which has little in the way of sights but is a handy gateway to the scenic dales.

Orientation & Information

Matlock Bath is 2 miles south of Matlock. Everything revolves around North Pde and South Pde, a line of seaside-style shops, attractions, pubs and places to eat along one side of the main road through town (the A6), with the murmuring River Derwent and a plush gorge on the other side.

Matlock Bath's **tourist office** (☎ 55082; www.derbyshire.gov.uk; the Pavilion; 🕒 9.30am-5pm daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) is run by helpful staff armed with reams of leaflets and guidebooks.

Sights & Activities

One of the delights of Matlock Bath is simply strolling along the promenade, munching on chips or candyfloss. For a scenic detour, you can meander across the river to the park on the other side and take one of the steep paths to great clifftop viewpoints.

At the enthusiast-run **Mining Museum** (☎ 583834; the Pavilion; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 10am-5pm May-Sep, 11am-3pm Nov-Apr) you can clamber through the shafts and tunnels where Derbyshire lead miners once eked out a risky living. Bizarrely, part of the museum was once a dancehall. For £2 extra (child £1), you can go down **Temple Mine** and pan for 'gold'.

For a different view, go to the **Heights of Abraham** (☎ 582365; adult/child £9.50/6.50; 🕒 10am-5pm daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Feb-Mar), which claims to be the Peak District's 'oldest attraction'. It is an excellent, wholesome family day out, with underground caverns, an adventure playground and woodland nature trails. The price includes a spectacular cable-car ride up from the valley floor.

From the cable-car base, walking trails lead up to viewpoints on top of **High Tor**. You can see down to Matlock Bath and over to **Riber Castle**, a Victorian folly.

A mile south of Matlock Bath is **Masson Mills Working Textile Museum** (☎ 581001; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun), built in 1783 for pioneering industrialist Sir Richard Arkwright. It's still working today, with renovated looms and weaving machines, and the world's largest collection of bobbins bringing more than 200 years of textile history to life. It's now cunningly combined with a 'shopping village', including three floors of high-street textile and clothing names.

From the beginning of September to October don't miss the **Matlock Illuminations** (Derwent Gardens; admission £3; 🕒 evenings from dusk Fri-Sun), with streams of pretty lights, outrageously decorated Venetian boats on the river and fireworks.

Sleeping

Matlock Bath has several B&Bs in the heart of things on North Pde and South Pde, and a few places just out of the centre. There are also more choices in nearby Matlock.

Matlock YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5960; matlock@yha.org.uk; 40 Bank Rd; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95) A basic, big housing block 2 miles from Matlock Bath, with likeable, friendly staff. It is due to close in October 2007.

Hodgkinson's Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 582170; www.hodgkinsons-hotel.co.uk; 150 South Pde; s/d from £38/70; Ⓟ) You seem to stumble into the 19th century when you enter this brilliantly quirky hotel. From the wooden-handled umbrellas by the door to the bizarrely shaped rooms and antique chairs, it is soaked in Victorian atmosphere and charm. Rooms come with beams and brass bed-knobs.

Temple Hotel (☎ 583911; www.templehotel.co.uk; Temple Walk; s/d £55/92; Ⓟ ⊠) The views from this hillside hotel are fantastic – so lovely that poet Lord Byron once felt inspired to etch a poem on the restaurant window. It's been a hotel for 400 years (and a good chunk of its recent history with the same décor). The rooms are straight from the 1970s but that's part of the charm. Bar meals are available.

Eating & Drinking

North Pde and South Pde are lined end-to-end with cafés, teashops and takeaways, serving chocolate cake, fish and chips, fried chicken, pies and burgers – hear those arteries scream!

Temple Hotel (☎ 583911; Temple Walk) On the hillside, the bar at this hotel has reasonable pub food and a fine restaurant.

Fishpond (☎ 581000; 204 South Pde) This pub gets a lively, spirited crowd and is surprisingly jumping for a pub in rural Derbyshire. It has some great (and not-so-great) live music.

Victorian Tea Shop (☎ 583325; 118 North Pde; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) For the pick of the teahouses, stroll elegantly into this place, all lace curtains, cream cakes and delicate crockery. You may find yourself mingling with bikers with slightly less finesse!

Getting There & Away

The Peak District is extremely well served by public transport, and Matlock is a hub. Buses 213 and 214 go to and from Sheffield (one hour 10 minutes) several times a day. There are hourly buses to and from Derby (1¼ hours) and Chesterfield (35 minutes). There is also a train station. Several trains a day serve Derby (30 minutes). For detailed travel planning information, go to www.derbysbus.net.

CHESTERFIELD

☎ 01246 / pop 100,879

This is an unremarkable town with the exception of one famous landmark: the eye-catching crooked spire of **St Mary & All Saints Church** (☎ 206506; admission free, tours adult/child £3.50/1.50; 🕒 9am-5pm). Dating from 1360, the giant corkscrew spire is 68m high and leans almost 3m southwest. There are various theories why: it probably was due to green timber warping, although some still prefer to believe that the spire was so amazed to hear of a virgin being married in the church that it twisted to see the sight for itself. Tour times vary; call to arrange.

The **tourist office** (☎ 345777; Rykneld Sq; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is right opposite the crooked spire in a sleek black building. It's very useful for planning a trip to the Peak District.

The easiest way to get here is by train. Chesterfield is between Nottingham/Derby (20 minutes) and Sheffield (10 minutes), with services about hourly. The station is just east of the centre.

AROUND CHESTERFIELD

Hardwick

If you're weighing up which stately homes to see, **Hardwick Hall** (NT; ☎ 01246-850430; adult/child £7.80/3.90; 🕒 noon-4.30pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) should be high on your list. It was home to the 16th century's second most powerful woman, Elizabeth, countess of Shrewsbury – known to all as Bess of Hardwick. Unashamedly modelling herself on the era's *most* famous woman – Queen Elizabeth I – Bess gained power and wealth by marrying four times, upwards each time.

When her fourth husband died in 1590, Bess had a huge fortune to play with, and had Hardwick Hall built using the designs of eminent architect Robert Smythson. Glass was a status symbol, so she went all-out on the windows, and a contemporary ditty quipped 'Hardwick Hall – more glass than wall.' Also astounding are the magnificent High Great Chamber and Long Gallery. These and many other rooms and broad stairways are decorated with fabulous large tapestries.

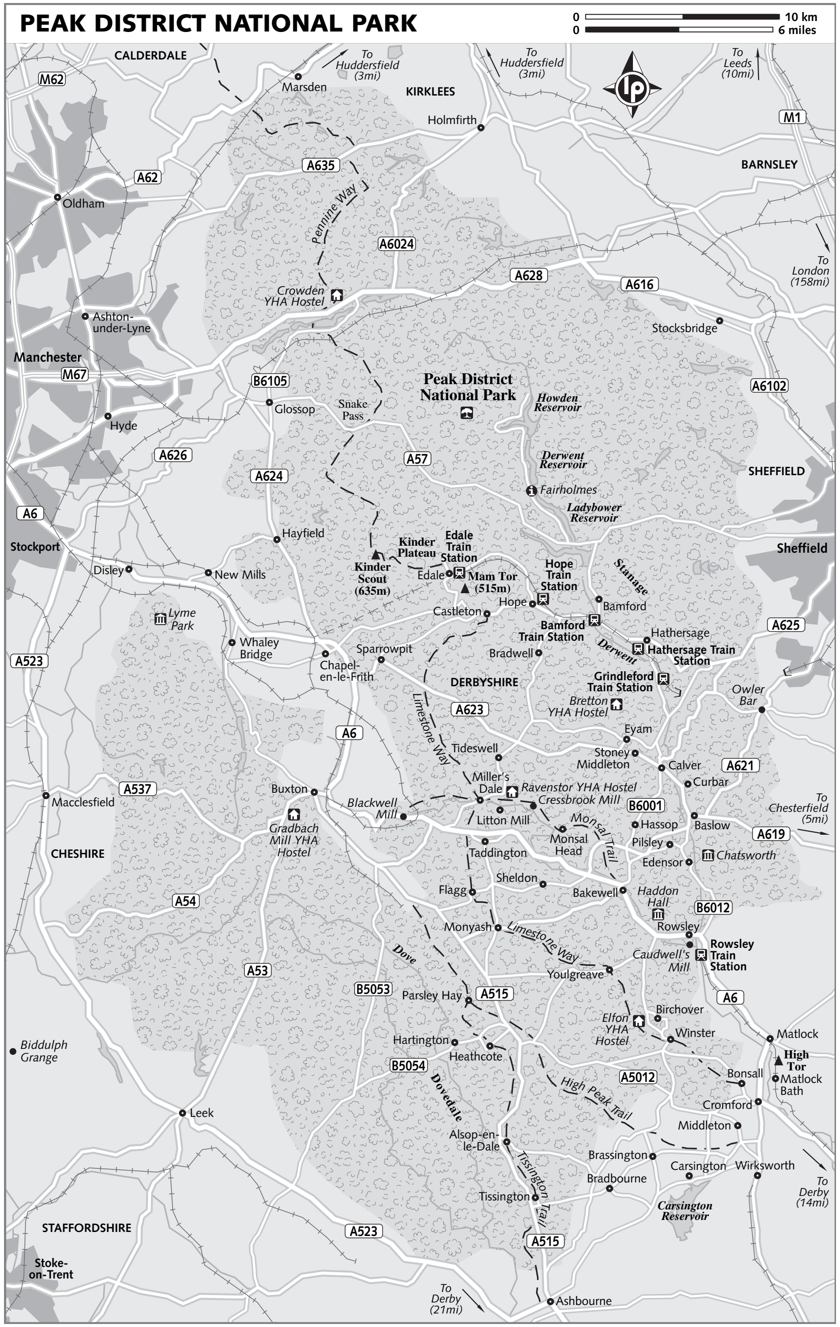
Next door is **Hardwick Old Hall** (EH; adult/child £3.50/1.80, joint ticket £10.60/5.30; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 11am-5pm Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Oct), Bess's first house, now a romantic ruin.

Hardwick Hall is 10 miles southeast of Chesterfield, just off the M1. A special coach, Service 101, runs from Chesterfield train station (tickets £6, with 20% discount at Hardwick, Sunday June to August, Thursday July and August), out in the morning, back in the afternoon, giving about three hours at Hardwick. The bus also passes **Stainsby Mill** – a quaint working flour mill dating from 1245 – and ends at **Bolsover Castle**, yet another stately home. For details, contact the Chesterfield tourist office or call **Chesterfield Community Transport** (☎ 01246-209668).

PEAK DISTRICT

The Peak District National Park features some of England's wildest, most beautiful scenery: pretty villages, historic sites, grand houses, fascinating limestone caves and the southernmost hills of the Pennines. Called the Peak not because of the hills, which are quite rounded, but because early British tribe the Picts once lived here, this is one of the country's best-loved national parks (it's the busiest in Europe, and the second busiest in the world after Mt Fuji). But don't be put off by its popularity: escaping the crowds is no problem if you avoid summer weekends, and even then, with a bit of imagination, it's easy to enjoy this wonderful area in relative peace and solitude.

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK


0 10 km
0 6 miles
CALDERDALE
M62
To Huddersfield (3mi)
To Huddersfield (3mi)
To Leeds (10mi)
Marsden
KIRKLEES
Holmfirth
M1
A635
A62
Oldham
BARNSLEY
Pennine Way
A6024
To London (158mi)
A628
A616
Crowden YHA Hostel
Ashton-under-Lyne
Stocksbridge
Manchester
M67
B6105
Peak District National Park
Howden Reservoir
A6102
Glossop
Snake Pass
Hyde
A626
A57
Derwent Reservoir
SHEFFIELD
A624
Fairholmes
Ladybower Reservoir
A6
Hayfield
Kinder Plateau
Edale Train Station
Stockport
Sheffield
Kinder Scout (635m)
Edale
Mam Tor (515m)
Hope Train Station
Stanage
Disley
New Mills
Hope
Bamford
Lyme Park
Castleton
Bamford Train Station
Hathersage
A625
Whaley Bridge
Sparrowpit
Bradwell
Hathersage Train Station
A523
Chapel-en-le-Frith
Derwent
DERBYSHIRE
Grindleford Train Station
Owler Bar
Limestone Way
A623
Bretton YHA Hostel
A6
Eyam
Tideswell
Stoney Middleton
Calver
A621
Miller's Dale
Ravenstor YHA Hostel
Curbar
To Chesterfield (5mi)
A537
Buxton
Cressbrook Mill
B6001
Macclesfield
Blackwell Mill
Litton Mill
Monsal Trail
Hassop
Baslow
Gradbach Mill YHA Hostel
Monsal Head
Pilsley
A619
CHESHIRE
Taddington
Chatsworth
Edensor
Sheldon
A54
Flagg
Bakewell
Haddon Hall
B6012
Monyash
Rowsley
Limestone Way
Rowsley Train Station
Dove
Caudwell's Mill
A53
Youlgreave
B5053
Parsley Hay
A515
A6
Birchover
Elton YHA Hostel
Winster
Matlock
Biddulph Grange
Hartington
High Tor
Heathcote
Matlock Bath
B5054
A5012
Bonsall
Dovedale
High Peak Trail
Cromford
Leek
Middleton
Alsop-en-le-Dale
Brassington
Carsington
Wirksworth
Bradbourne
Tissington Trail
To Derby (14mi)
Tissington
Carsington Reservoir
STAFFORDSHIRE
A523
A515
Stoke-on-Trent
To Derby (21mi)
Ashbourne

Orientation & Information

The Peak District is principally in Derbyshire but spills into five adjoining counties (including Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire) and is one of the largest national parks in England. This 555-sq-mile protected area is divided into two distinct zones: the harsher, higher, wilder Dark Peak to the north, characterised by peaty moors and dramatic gritstone cliffs called 'edges'; and the lower, prettier, more pastoral White Peak to the south, with green fields marked by dry-stone walls, and divided by deep dales.

There are tourist offices (those run by the national park are called visitor centres) in Buxton, Bakewell, Castleton, Edale and other locations, all overflowing with maps, guidebooks and leaflets detailing walks, cycle rides and other activities. For general information, the free *Peak District* newspaper and the official park website at www.peakdistrict.org cover transport, activities, local events, guided walks and so on.

Activities

CAVING

The Peak District limestone is riddled with caves and caverns, including 'showcaves' open to the public in Castleton, Buxton and Matlock Bath (described in each of those sections). For serious caving (or potholing) trips, tourist offices can provide a list of accredited outdoor centres, and if you know what you're doing, Castleton makes a great base.

For guidebooks, gear (to buy or hire) and a mine of local information, contact **Hitch n Hike** (☎ 01433-651013; www.hitchnhike.co.uk; Mytham Bridge, Bamford, Hope Valley, Derbyshire), a specialist caving and outdoor-activity shop in Bamford, near Castleton. The website also has more info about caving in the area.

CYCLING

The Peak District is a very popular cycling area, especially the White Peak and the parts of Derbyshire south of here around Matlock and Ashbourne, which have a network of quiet lanes, and tracks for mountain bikers. In the Dark Peak there are fewer roads, and they are quite busy with traffic, although there are some good off-road routes. A good place to start any ride is a tourist office; all stock maps, books and leaflets for cyclists and mountain bikers.

In the Dark Peak, Edale is a popular starting point for mountain bikers, and near the Derwent Reservoirs is also good. In the White Peak, all the villages mentioned in this section make good bases for cycle tours.

For easy traffic-free riding, head for the 17.5-mile **High Peak Trail**, a route for cyclists and walkers on the mostly flat track of an old railway. You can join the trail at Cromford, near Matlock Bath, but it starts with a very steep incline, so if you seek easy gradients a better start is Middleton Top, a mile or so north. The trail winds through beautiful hills and farmland to a village called Parsley Hay, and continues on for a few more miles towards Buxton. At Parsley Hay another former-railway-turned-walking-and-cycling-route, the **Tissington Trail**, heads south for 13 miles to Ashbourne. You can go out and back as far as you like, or make it a triangular circuit, following the busy B5053 or (a better choice) the quiet lanes through Bradbourne and Brassington.

The **Pennine Bridleway** is another, more recent addition, and is suitable for horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

There are several cycle-hire centres in the Peak District, including **Derwent Cycle Hire** (☎ 01433-651261), and **Parsley Hay** (☎ 01298-84493) and **Middleton Top** (☎ 01629-823204) for the Tissington and High Peak Trails. Tourist offices have a leaflet with all other hire centres, opening times etc. Charges hover around £10 to £15 per day for adults' bikes (deposit and ID required), and kids' bikes and trailers are also available.

WALKING

The Peak District is one of the most popular walking areas in England, crossed by a vast network of footpaths and tracks – especially in the White Peak – and you can easily find a walk of a few miles or longer, depending on your energy and interests. If you want to explore the higher realms of the Dark Peak, which often involves the local art of 'bog trotting', make sure your boots are waterproof and be prepared for wind and rain – even if the sun is shining when you set off.

The Peak's most famous walking trail is the **Pennine Way**, with its southern end at Edale and its northern end more than 250 miles away in Scotland. If you don't have a spare three weeks, from Edale you can follow the trail north across wild hills and moors for just a day or two, or even less. An excellent three-day option is to Hebden Bridge, a delightful little town in Yorkshire.

The 46-mile **Limestone Way** winds through the Derbyshire countryside from Castleton to Rocester in Staffordshire on a mix of footpaths, tracks and quiet lanes. The northern section of this route, through the White Peak between Castleton and Matlock, is 26 miles, and hardy folk can do it over a long summer day, but two days is better. The route goes via Miller's Dale, Monyash, Youlgreave and Bonsall, with YHA hostels and B&Bs along the way, and ample pubs and cafés. Tourist offices have a detailed leaflet.

Various shorter walks are described throughout this section.

Sleeping

Tourist offices have lists of accommodation for every budget. Perhaps the best budget options are the various camping barns (beds from £5 per person) dotted around the Peak. Usually owned by farmers, they can be booked centrally through the **YHA** (☎ 0870 870 8808).

Getting There & Around

The Peak District authorities are trying hard to wean visitors off their cars, and tourist offices stock the excellent *Derbyshire Bus Timetable* (80p) covering local buses and trains. For more details, see p440.

BUXTON

☎ 01298 / pop 24,112

With its grand Georgian architecture, central crescent, leafy parks, tourists and thermal waters, Buxton invites comparisons to Bath. It's smaller in scale, however, and lodged a little less far up its own backside. While the Romans discovered the natural warm-water springs, the town's heyday was not until the 18th century when 'taking the waters' was highly fashionable. After years of relative obscurity, ambitious restoration projects have put the sparkle back into the town, especially the resurrection of the Opera House, which had fallen into disuse in the 1970s.

Every Tuesday and Saturday, colourful stalls light up Market Pl. The town itself is made for hours of browsing idly and café-crawling.

Situated just outside the border of the Peak District National Park, Buxton is an excellent, picturesque base to get to the northern and western areas.

Orientation & Information

Buxton effectively has two centres: the historical area, with the Crescent, Opera House and Pavilion; and Market Pl, surrounded by pubs and restaurants. There are several banks with ATMs on the Quadrant.

Cyber@Emporium (☎ 214455; 28 High St; 🕐 noon-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, 11am-7pm Sun; per hr £3) Internet access.

Post office (Spring Gardens; 🕐 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 25106; www.peakdistrict-tourism.gov.uk; the Crescent; 🕐 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) Has useful leaflets on walks in the area.

Sights & Activities

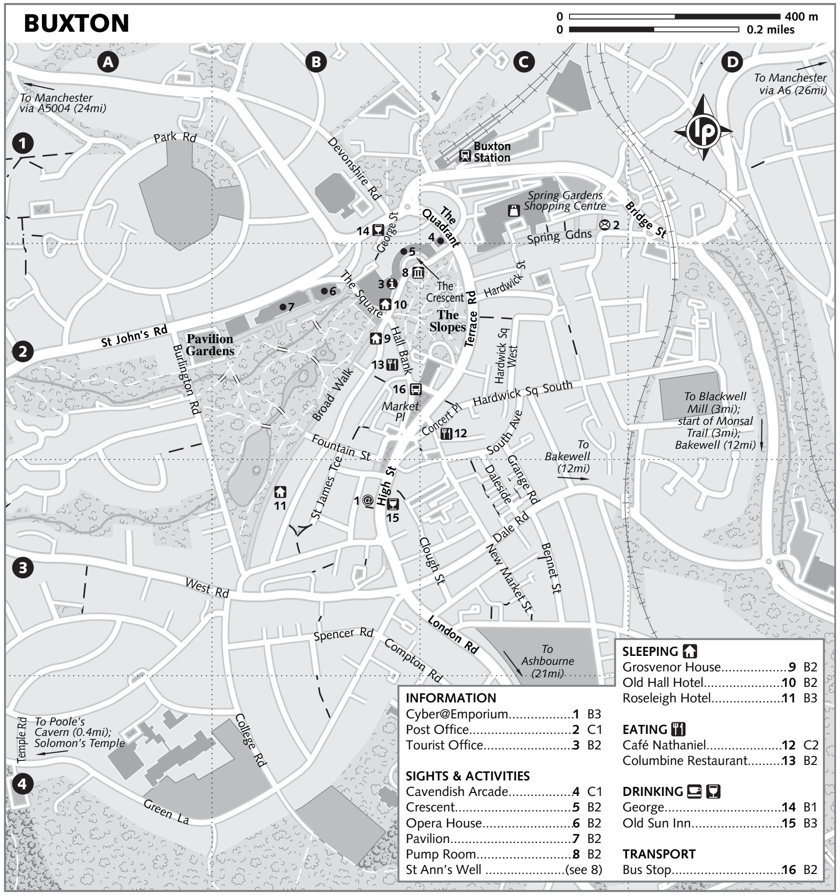
Buxton's gorgeously restored **Opera House** (☎ 0845 127 2190; www.buxton-opera.co.uk; Water St) enjoys a full programme of drama, dance, concerts and comedy as well as staging some renowned festivals and events (see p448). Tours (£2) of the auditorium and backstage areas are available at 11am most Saturday mornings.

Next to the Opera House is the **Pavilion**, an impressive palace of glass and cast iron built in 1871, which overlooks the impeccably manicured **Pavilion Gardens**. Skirting the gardens, the grand, pedestrian **Broad Walk** promenade is the perfect place for a gentle evening stroll.

Another impressive Buxton construction, the graceful curved terrace of the **Crescent** – reminiscent of the Royal Crescent in Bath – is waiting its turn for regeneration. A luxury hotel complex is imminent. Just east of here is **Cavendish Arcade**, formerly a thermal bathhouse (you can still see the chair used for lowering the infirm into the restorative waters), with several craft and book shops, and a striking coloured-glass ceiling.

Across from the tourist office, the **Pump Room**, which dispensed Buxton's spring water for nearly a century, now hosts temporary art exhibitions. Just outside is **St Ann's Well**, a fountain from which Buxton's famous thermal waters still flow – and where a regular procession of tourists queue to fill plastic bottles and slake their thirst with the liquid's 'curative' power.

Poole's Cavern (☎ 26978; www.poolescavern.co.uk; adult/child £6.20/3.50; 🕐 10am-5pm Mar-Oct) is a magnificent natural limestone cavern, about a mile from central Buxton. Guides take you deep underground to see an impressive formation of stalactites (the ones that hang down) – including one of England's longest – and distinctive 'poached egg'–formation stalagmites.


BUXTON
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To Manchester via A5004 (24mi)
To Manchester via A6 (26mi)
Park Rd
Devonshire Rd
Buxton Station
George St
The Quadrant
Spring Gardens Shopping Centre
Spring Gdns
Bridge St
The Square
The Crescent
The Slopes
Terrace Rd
Hardwick St
Hardwick Sq West
Hardwick Sq South
St John's Rd
Pavilion Gardens
Burlington Rd
Broad Walk
Hall Bank
Market Pl
Concert Pl
South Ave
Grange Rd
Dale Rd
Dalesside
Fountain St
St James Tce
High St
To Blackwell Mill (3mi); start of Monsal Trail (3mi); Bakewell (12mi)
To Bakewell (12mi)
West Rd
Clough St
New Market St
Bennet St
London Rd
Spencer Rd
Compton Rd
To Ashbourne (21mi)
To Poole's Cavern (0.4mi); Solomon's Temple
Temple Rd
College Rd
Green La
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Pavilion 7 B2
Pump Room 8 B2
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SLEEPING
Grosvenor House 9 B2
Old Hall Hotel 10 B2
Roseleigh Hotel 11 B3
EATING
Café Nathaniel 12 C2
Columbine Restaurant 13 B2
DRINKING
George 14 B1
Old Sun Inn 15 B3
TRANSPORT
Bus Stop 16 B2

Festivals & Events

All the big events in Buxton revolve around its beautifully restored Opera House located in the historical area.

Four Four Time An annual live-music festival staged in February each year, including a medley of jazz, blues, folk and world-music acts.

Buxton Festival (www.buxtonfestival.co.uk) This renowned festival takes place in July and is one of the largest of its kind in the country. As well as opera, literary notables such as Louis de Bernières hold sway.

Buxton Fringe (www.buxtonfringe.com) In the same month, the more contemporary Buxton Fringe is gathering popularity.

International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival (www.gs-festival.co.uk) This very popular festival is held at the end of July/beginning of August.

Sleeping

Buxton is awash with good-value, elegant guesthouses – many dating from Victorian times – that are steeped in atmosphere. You'll find the pick of the bunch on Broad Walk.

Roseleigh Hotel (☎ 24904; www.roseleighhotel.co.uk; 19 Broad Walk; s/d incl breakfast from £30/64; P 🚭 💻) This tasteful family-run B&B in a spacious old terraced house gives a delightful panorama from the breakfast room onto the ducks paddling in the picturesque Pavilion Gardens lake. The owners are a welcoming couple, both seasoned travellers, who have given each room a warm, Victorian style.

Grosvenor House (☎ 72439; grosvenor.buxton@btopenworld.com; 1 Broad Walk; s/d incl breakfast from £40/60; P 💻) Affable owners run this tranquil, period-decorated hotel with period furniture and fine views from the front bedrooms. It's well situated on the corner of Pavilion Gardens.

Old Hall Hotel (☎ 22841; www.oldhallhotelbuxton.co.uk; the Square; s/d incl breakfast £65/110) There is a tale to go with every creak of the floorboards at this genial, history-soaked establishment, supposedly the oldest hotel in England. Mary Queen of Scots was held here from 1576 to 1578, and the wood-panelled corridors and rooms are as well appointed and elegant as they must have been in her day.

Eating & Drinking

The Market Sq/High St strip spills over with lairy, alco-fuelled revellers on weekend evenings, but there are a few great pubs all the same. Head down to the area around the Opera House for a more laid-back evening.

Café Nathaniel (☎ 23969; Market St; mains £7.50-10; 🕑 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) It's worth pitching up early to snare a seat at this relaxed but small café with scrubbed wooden tables and fresh seafood. It has an adjoining linen, lace and antique shop next door.

Columbine Restaurant (☎ 78752; Hall Bank; mains £10-12.50; 🕑 lunch Thu-Sat, dinner 7-11pm Mon & Wed-Sat) Perched on the slope leading down to the Crescent, this excellent understated restaurant is top choice among Buxtonites in the know. Choose from local produce (Derbyshire lamb £12.50) and an extensive vegetarian menu.

Old Sun Inn (☎ 23452; 33 High St) The pick of the town's watering holes, but one which retains an Edwardian-era ambience. Low ceilings, antique light fittings, flagstone floors and a different crowd in every cranny of this warrenlike ale-house make it *the* place to head for a pint – not to mention the surprisingly sophisticated pub grub.

A convivial, bohemian crowd gather within earshot of the Buxton Opera House at the **George** (☎ 24711; the Square), where they sit on a hotchpotch of chairs and lean across big wooden tables to put the world to rights.

Getting There & Away

Buxton is well served by public transport. The best place to get the bus is Market Sq, where services go to Derby (1½ hours, twice hourly), Chesterfield (1¼ hours, several daily) and Sheffield (65 minutes, every 30 minutes). Trains run hourly to and from Manchester (50 minutes).

EDALE

☎ 01433

Time seems to have stood still at this enchanting picture-postcard village. Surrounded by sweeping Peak District countryside at its most majestic, the tiny cluster of imposing stone houses and the parish church are eye-catching in their own right. Ramblers and mountain bikers love it here: Edale lies between the White and Dark Peak areas, and is the southern terminus of the Pennine Way. Its train station makes this seemingly remote enclave very accessible – and highly popular.

Information

All the leaflets, maps and guides you'll need can be found at the recently revamped **tourist office** (☎ 670207; www.edale-valley.co.uk; Grindsbrook; 🕑 10am-5pm), which also includes some updated displays telling the story of the landscape.

Activities

Heading south, a great walk from Edale takes you up to **Hollins Cross**, a point on the ridge that runs south of the valley. From here, you can aim west to the top of spectacular **Mam Tor** and watch the hang-gliders swoop around above. Or go east along the ridge, with great views on both sides, past the cliffs of **Back Tor** to reach Lose Hill (which, naturally, faces Win Hill). Or you can continue south, down to the village of Castleton.

From Edale you can also walk north onto the **Kinder Plateau**, dark and brooding in the mist, gloriously high and open when the sun's out. Weather permitting, a fine circular walk starts by following the Pennine Way through fields to **Upper Booth**, then up a path called Jacobs Ladder and along the southern edge of Kinder, before dropping down to Edale via the steep rocky valley of Grindsbrook Clough, or the ridge of Ringing Roger.

Sleeping

Edale YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5808; edale@yha.org.uk; dm members/nonmembers incl breakfast £16.45/19.45; P 💻) This spartan hostel in an old country house 1.5 miles east of the village centre has spectacular views across to Back Tor. It's also an activity centre and is very popular with youth groups.

Mam Tor House (☎ 670253; www.mamtorhouse.co.uk; Grindsbrook; B&B per person around £22.50; P) Lovely stained-glass windows distinguish this characterful lodging in an Edwardian house right next to the church.

For campers, the National Park Authority–owned **Fieldhead Campsite** (☎ 670386; www.fieldhead-campsite.co.uk; sites per person £4.50; 🅿), by the tourist office (visitor centre), is the most convenient option. With good facilities, it is also popular with youth groups, and has separate fields dedicated to families and backpackers. **Cotefield Farm Camping Barn** (☎ 0870 870 8808; per person £5; 🅿) is bookable through the YHA.

Eating

Edale has two walker-friendly pubs, the refurbished **Old Nag's Head** (☎ 670291; Grindsbrook) and the **Rambler Inn** (☎ 670268; Grindsbrook), which also does B&B. Both serve passable pub grub (£4.95 to £6.95). But the best food in the area is served beneath the beamed ceilings of the **Cheshire Cheese** (☎ 620381; Edale Road; mains £7-10), located around 4 miles from Edale near the neighbouring village of Hope. It has a mud-scraper on hand for dirty boots and is perfect for a posthike pint.

Getting There & Away

Edale is on the train line between Sheffield and Manchester (about eight per day Monday to Friday, five at weekends). Trains also stop at several other Peak villages. At the weekends and on Bank Holidays, bus 260 connects Edale to Castleton (25 minutes, seven daily), with the final bus going on to Buxton.

CASTLETON

☎ 01433 / pop 1200

Nestled in the shadow of 517m-high Mam Tor and crowned by the ruins of Peveril Castle, the neat little settlement of Castleton has a couple of narrow lanes with sturdy gritstone houses and colourful gardens, and a good collection of cosy country pubs. Oh yes – and about a million tourists on summer weekends. But don't let that put you off. Come here at a quieter time to enjoy good walks, and marvel at the famous 'showcaves', where a semiprecious stone called Blue John has been mined for centuries.

Orientation & Information

Castleton stands at the western end of the Hope Valley. The main road from the village goes up the narrow, spectacular gorge of Winnats Pass toward Edale (the A625 route used to cut across Mam Tor, but the Peak's brittle shale led to a landslip in 1977 that destroyed the road). Cross St is the main street; most of the pubs, shops, cafés, B&Bs, the YHA hostel, and the modern **tourist office** (☎ 620679; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) are here or just nearby.

Sights

Crowning the hill to the south of Castleton is ruined **Peveril Castle** (EH; ☎ 620613; adult/child £3/1.50; ⏲ 10am-6pm May-Jul, 10am-7pm Aug, 10am-5pm Apr, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar), well worth the steep walk up from the village. William Peveril, son of William the Conqueror, built it originally, and Henry II added the central keep in 1176. The ruins are wickedly atmospheric, and the setting isn't bad either, with a stunning view over the Hope Valley, straight down to Castleton's medieval street grid and north to Mam Tor and beyond.

The area around Castleton is riddled with underground limestone caves, and four are open to the public. Although mostly natural, they have expanded from extensive lead, silver and Blue John mining over the centuries. The most convenient, **Peak Cavern** (☎ 620285; www.devilsarse.com; adult/child £6.25/4.25; ⏲ 10am-4pm daily Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), is easily reached by a pretty streamside walk from the village centre. It has the largest natural cave entrance in England, known (not so prettily) as the Devil's Arse. Visits are by hourly guided tour only.

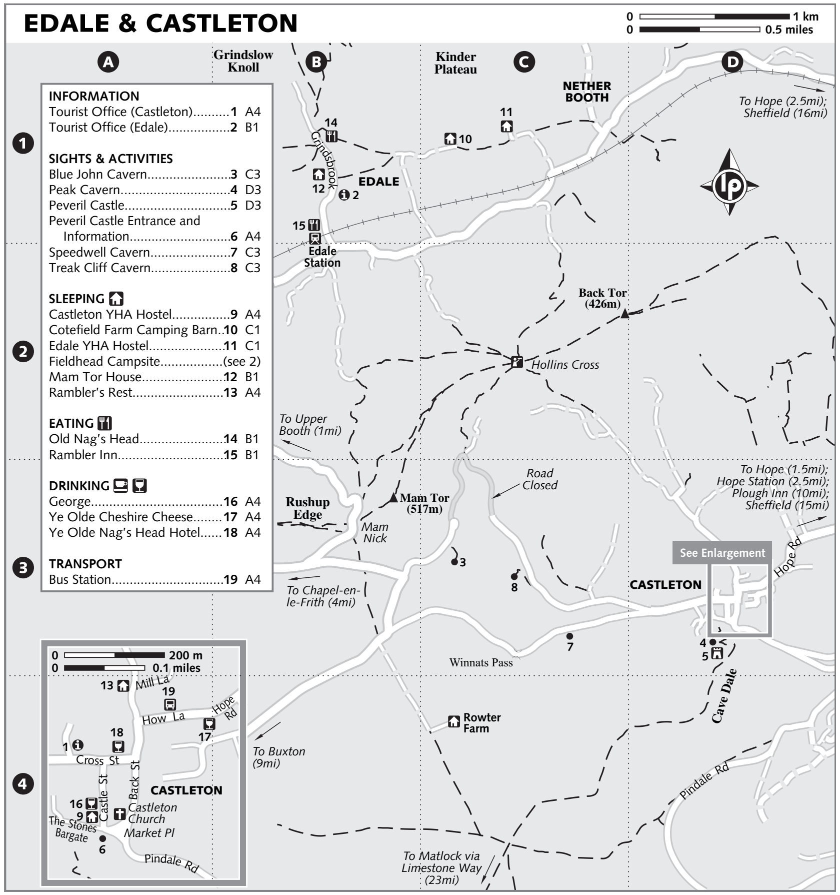
Speedwell Cavern (☎ 620512; adult/child £6.75/4.75; ⏲ 10am-5pm May-Sep, to 3.30pm Oct-Apr) includes a unique boat trip through a flooded mineshaft, where visitors glide in eerie silence to reach a huge subterranean lake called the Bottomless Pit. Claustrophobics should make their excuses.

Treak Cliff Cavern (☎ 620571; adult/child £6.50/3.50; ⏲ 10am-4.20pm Mar-Oct, to 3.20pm Nov-Feb) is a short walk from Castleton, with colourful exposed seams of Blue John and great limestone stalactites, including the much-photographed 'stork'.

Blue John Cavern (☎ 620638; adult/child £7/3.50; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm summer, to dusk winter) is an impressive set of natural caverns, where the rich veins of the Blue John mineral can prove dazzling. Watch out for the old mining equipment, also on display. You can get here on foot up the closed section of the Mam Tor road.

Activities

Castleton is the northern terminus of the Limestone Way (p446), which includes narrow, rocky Cave Dale, far below the east wall of the castle.



EDALE & CASTLETON

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
INFORMATION
Tourist Office (Castleton)..........1 A4
Tourist Office (Edale)................2 B1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
Blue John Cavern......................3 C3
Peak Cavern............................4 D3
Peveril Castle...........................5 D3
Peveril Castle Entrance and Information...........................6 A4
Speedwell Cavern.....................7 C3
Treak Cliff Cavern.....................8 C3
SLEEPING
Castleton YHA Hostel................9 A4
Cotefield Farm Camping Barn..10 C1
Edale YHA Hostel....................11 C1
Fieldhead Campsite.................(see 2)
Mam Tor House......................12 B1
Rambler's Rest........................13 A4
EATING
Old Nag's Head.......................14 B1
Rambler Inn............................15 B1
DRINKING
George...................................16 A4
Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese........17 A4
Ye Olde Nag's Head Hotel......18 A4
TRANSPORT
Bus Station..............................19 A4
Grindslow Knoll
Kinder Plateau
NETHER BOOTH
EDALE
Grindsbrook
Edale Station
To Hope (2.5mi); Sheffield (16mi)
Back Tor (426m)
Hollins Cross
To Upper Booth (1mi)
Rushup Edge
Mam Tor (517m)
Mam Nick
Road Closed
To Hope (1.5mi); Hope Station (2.5mi); Plough Inn (10mi); Sheffield (15mi)
See Enlargement
Hope Rd
CASTLETON
To Chapel-en-le-Frith (4mi)
Winnats Pass
Cave Dale
Rowter Farm
To Buxton (9mi)
Pindale Rd
To Matlock via Limestone Way (23mi)
0 200 m
0 0.1 miles
Mill La
How La
Hope Rd
Cross St
Castle St
Back St
CASTLETON
Castleton Church
Market Pl
The Stones
Bargate
Pindale Rd

If you feel like a shorter walk, you can follow the Limestone Way up Cave Dale for a few miles, then loop round on paths and tracks to the west of Rowter Farm to meet the Buxton Rd. Go straight (north) on a path crossing fields and another road to eventually reach Mam Nick, where the road to Edale passes through a gap in the ridge. Go up steps here to reach the summit of Mam Tor, for spectacular views along the Hope Valley. (You can also see the fractured remains of the old main road.) The path then aims northwest along the ridge to another gap called Hollins Cross, from where paths and tracks lead back down to Castleton. This 6-mile circuit takes three to four hours.

A shorter option from Castleton is to take the path direct to Hollins Cross, then go to Mam Tor, and return by the same route (about 4 miles, two to three hours). From Hollins Cross, you can extend any walk by dropping down to Edale, or you can walk direct from Castleton to Edale via Hollins Cross. Maps are available at the tourist office, and its *Walks Around Castleton* leaflet (30p) has plenty of alternative routes.

Sleeping

Prices listed are peak weekend rates, but almost all Castleton options have good weekday deals.

Castleton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5758; castleton@yha.org.uk; Castle St; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95; 🅿 💻) A rambling, old building with an abundance of rooms, this hostel is a great pit stop with knowledgeable staff who also conduct guided walks. There's a licensed bar too.

Rambler's Rest (☎ 620125; www.ramblersrest-castleton.co.uk; Mill Bridge; s/d from £25/40; P) Rooms are well appointed and comfortable in this attractively restored 17th-century stone cottage. It has a large en-suite room with three or four beds (£22 per person), ideal for small groups or people with kids. Some rooms have shared bathrooms.

Eating & Drinking

George (☎ 620238; Castle St; mains around £7) Flagstone floors, and the tankards dangling from the ceiling, give this ageing local a measure of olde-worlde charm. But it's very much on the beaten tourist track – and don't expect any earth-shattering cuisine.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (☎ 620330; How Lane; mains £7-9) One-armed bandits are most definitely off limits at this well-known alehouse, where tradition is everything. The home cooking needs a little attention but go for the peaceful, snug atmosphere.

Ye Olde Nag's Head Hotel (☎ 620248; Cross St; bar meals £7-10) This cosy, traditional local is a 17th-century coaching house, where the conversation gets livelier as the night goes on. The all-you-can-eat carvery lures hungry diners from miles around. Comfy B&B rooms (per person £36), including one with Jacuzzi, are upstairs; get the ones on the top floor with a view and away from the noise.

Getting There & Away

You can get to Castleton from Bakewell on bus 173 (45 minutes, five per day Monday to Friday, three per day at weekends) via Hope and Tideswell. The 68 goes to Buxton at 9am from Monday to Saturday, while the 174 gets all the way to Matlock on Sunday and Bank Holidays (4.35pm start).

The nearest train station is Hope, about 1 mile east of Hope village (a total of 3 miles east of Castleton) on the line between Sheffield and Manchester. At summer weekends a bus runs between Hope station and Castleton tying in with the trains, although it's not a bad walk in good weather.

EYAM

☎ 01433 / pop 900

The former lead-mining village of Eyam (ee-em) is a quaint little spot with a morbidly touching history. In 1665 a consignment of cloth from London delivered to a local tailor carried the dreaded Black Death plague. What could have been a widespread disaster remained a localised tragedy thanks to the bravery of the village inhabitants: as the plague spread, the rector, William Mompesson, and his predecessor Thomas Stanley, convinced villagers to quarantine themselves rather than transmit the disease further. Selflessly, they did so; by the time the plague ended in late 1666, it had wiped out whole families, killing around 250 of the village's 800 inhabitants. People in surrounding villages remained relatively unscathed. Even independently of this poignant story, Eyam is well worth a visit; its sloping streets of old cottages backed by rolling green hills form a classic postcard view of the Peak District.

Sights

The **Church of St Lawrence** (☎ 630930; 🕑 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) dates from Saxon times and carries a moving display on the plague and its devastating effect on the village. Look out for the plague register, recording those who died, name by name, day by day. Perhaps most likely to bring a lump to your throat (although there are several contenders) is the extract from a letter the rector wrote to his children about his wife, Catherine Mompesson, who succumbed to the disease. Her headstone lies in the churchyard. In the same grounds is an 8th-century **Celtic cross**, one of the finest in England. Before leaving, you could also check your watch against the **sundial** on the church wall.

Around the village, many buildings have information plaques attached; these include the **plague cottages**, where the tailor lived, next to the church.

Eyam Museum (☎ 631371; www.eyam.org.uk; Hawkhill Rd; adult/child £1.75/1.25; 🕑 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Easter-Oct) has some vivid displays on Eyam's plague experience, as well as putting it into the wider context of the effect of the bubonic plague elsewhere. There are also neat exhibits on geology, Saxon history and the village's time as a lead-mining and silk-weaving centre.

Look out too for the **stocks** on the village green – somewhere handy to leave the kids, perhaps, while you look at the church.

Activities

Eyam makes a great base for walking and cycling in the surrounding White Peak area. A short walk for starters leads up Water Lane

from the village square, then up through fields and a patch of woodland to meet another lane running between Eyam and Grindleford; turn right here and keep going uphill, past another junction to **Mompesson's Well**, where food and other supplies were left during the plague time for Eyam folk by friends from other villages. The Eyam people paid for the goods using coins sterilised in vinegar. You can retrace your steps back down the lane, then take a path which leads directly to the church. This 2-mile circuit takes about 1½ hours at a gentle pace.

Sleeping

Bretton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5720; bretton@yha.org.uk; Bretton, Hope Valley; dm members/nonmembers £10.95/13.95) If the Eyam YHA's full, this basic place is only 1.5 miles away.

Eyam YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5830; eyam@yha.org.uk; Hawkhill Rd; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95) In a fine old Victorian house with a folly, perched up a hill overlooking the village.

Crown Cottage (☎ 630858; www.crown-cottage.co.uk; Main Rd; d £50) Bright, walker- and cyclist-friendly – and full to the rafters most weekends. Book ahead to be sure of a spot.

Getting There & Away

Eyam is 7 miles north of Bakewell and 12 miles east of Buxton. Bus 175 from Bakewell goes to Eyam (three daily Monday to Saturday, no Sunday service). From Buxton, buses 65 and 66 run about six times per day to and from Chesterfield, stopping at Eyam (40 minutes).

BAKEWELL

☎ 01629 / pop 3,979

After Buxton, this is the largest town in the Peak District (though it's hardly a metropolis). It's not as interesting or picturesque as its posh spa-town neighbour, but it's a useful base for cyclists and walkers. It has a famous pudding (the Bakewell Pudding – it's not a tart you know), a couple of fine country houses within ambling distance and a reputation for traffic trail-backs on summer weekends.

Orientation & Information

The centre of town is Rutland Sq, from where roads radiate to Matlock, Buxton and Sheffield. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 813227; Bridge St; 🕑 10am-5pm), in the old Market Hall, has racks of leaflets and books about Bakewell and the national park.

Sights & Activities

Bakewell's weekly market is on Monday, when the square behind the tourist office is very lively. Up on the hill above Rutland Sq, **All Saints Church** has some ancient Norman features, and even older Saxon stonework remains, including a tall cross in the churchyard, which sadly has suffered at the hands of time.

Near the church, **Old House Museum** (☎ 813642; Cunningham Pl; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕑 11am-4pm Apr-Oct) displays a Tudor loo and, also on a scatological theme, shows how early Peakland houses used to be made with materials including cow dung.

A stroll from Rutland Sq down Bridge St brings you – not surprisingly – to the pretty **medieval bridge** over the River Wye, from where riverside walks lead in both directions. Go upstream through the water meadows, and then along Holme Lane to reach **Holme Bridge**, an ancient stone structure used by Peak District packhorses for centuries.

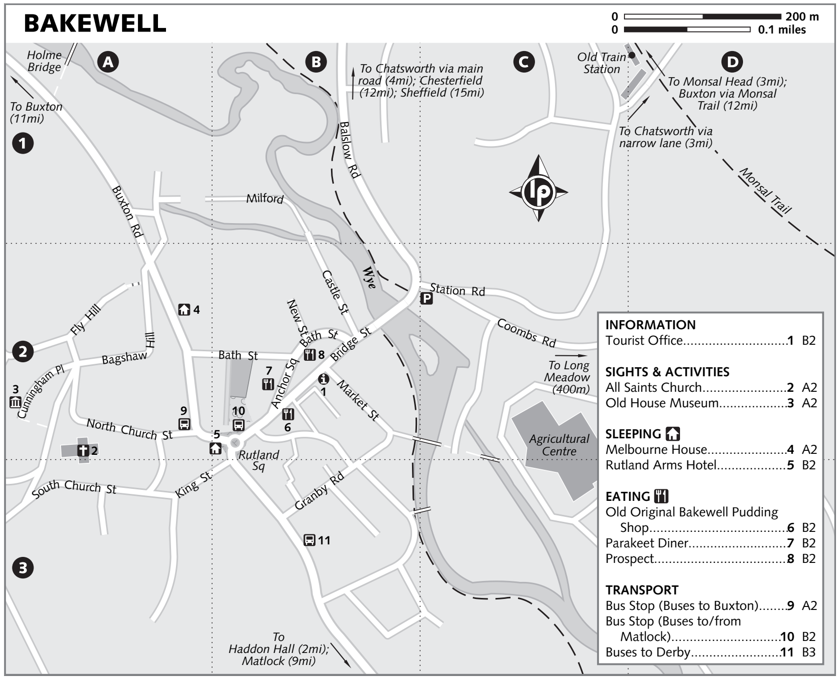
On the northern edge of Bakewell, a former railway line has been converted to a walking and cycling track called the **Monsal Trail**. From Bakewell you can cycle about 3 miles north and 1 mile south on the old railway itself, and there are numerous other tracks and country lanes nearby. The nearest place to hire a bike is the **Parsley Cycle Hire** (☎ 01298-84493) at the junction of the High Peak and Tissington Trails, about 5 miles southeast of Buxton. Walkers on the Monsal Trail follow alternate sections of the old railway and pretty footpaths through fields and beside rivers. From Bakewell, an excellent out-and-back walk (3 miles each way) goes to the dramatic viewpoint at Monsal Head, where a good pub, Stables Bar at the Monsal Head Hotel, provides welcome refreshment. Allow three hours for the round-trip.

Other walking routes go to the stately homes of Haddon Hall (p454) and Chatsworth House (p455). You could take a bus or taxi there and walk back, so you don't muddy the duke's carpet.

Sleeping

Melbourne House (☎ 815357; Buxton Rd; s/d £35/50; P ⊠) In a pretty, listed building dating back more than three centuries, this is an inviting B&B in the best Peak District tradition. It is on the main road leading to Buxton.

Rutland Arms Hotel (☎ 812812; www.rutlandarmsbakewell.com; the Square; s/d £65/120; P) Aristocratic but slightly careworn, this hotel is the


BAKEWELL
0 200 m
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A
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1
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3
Holme Bridge
To Buxton (11mi)
To Chatsworth via main road (4mi); Chesterfield (12mi); Sheffield (15mi)
Old Train Station
To Monsal Head (3mi); Buxton via Monsal Trail (12mi)
To Chatsworth via narrow lane (3mi)
Monsal Trail
Milford
Buxton Rd
Baslow Rd
Wye
Castle St
Station Rd
Coombs Rd
To Long Meadow (400m)
Agricultural Centre
Fly Hill
Hill
Bagshaw
Bath St
New St
Bath St
Bridge St
Anchor Sq
Market St
Cunningham Pl
North Church St
Rutland Sq
South Church St
King St
Granby Rd
To Haddon Hall (2mi); Matlock (9mi)
INFORMATION
Tourist Office 1 B2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
All Saints Church 2 A2
Old House Museum 3 A2
SLEEPING
Melbourne House 4 A2
Rutland Arms Hotel 5 B2
EATING
Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop 6 B2
Parakeet Diner 7 B2
Prospect 8 B2
TRANSPORT
Bus Stop (Buses to Buxton) 9 A2
Bus Stop (Buses to/from Matlock) 10 B2
Buses to Derby 11 B3

most refined of the Bakewell accommodation options. Get a higher room if traffic noise keeps you up. Room 20 has a four-poster bed that costs the same as a normal double.

Eating & Drinking

Bakewell's streets are lined with cute teashops and bakeries, most with 'pudding' in the name, selling the town's eponymous cake. It would be bad manners not to try the local speciality when in town.

Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop (☎ 812193; the Square) Probably has the best claim for having the original Bakewell Pudding recipe. They come in seriously jumbo sizes here, should you require.

Parakeet Diner (☎ 812349; the Square; haddock & chips £4.70; 🕑 9am-5pm) Has not a frill to be seen, right down to the plastic-backed chairs, but service comes with a smile, it's easy on your wallet and its generous portions help fuel the day's activities.

Prospect (☎ 810077; Bath St; mains £13-15; 🕑 noon-2pm & 7-8.30pm Tue-Sun) The flavour of the local restaurant scene. It's a smart bistro, with slick presentation, from the dark varnished bar to the serving of specials such as belly pork with local black pudding mash (£14.50).

Getting There & Away

Buses serve Bakewell from Derby via Matlock (most 90 minutes but there are some faster buses, twice hourly) and Chesterfield (45 minutes, hourly). The TransPeak service goes on to Nottingham (one hour 50 minutes, hourly).

AROUND BAKEWELL

Haddon Hall

You won't be the first to fall under the spell of **Haddon Hall** (☎ 01629-812855; www.haddonhall.co.uk; adult/child £7.75/4; 🕑 noon-4.30pm Sat-Mon Apr & Oct, daily May-Sep), one of the finest medieval houses you'll find anywhere. Film producers have long been aware of its charms. The hall dates back to the 12th century; what you see today dates mainly from the 14th to 16th centuries. It was abandoned in the 18th and 19th centuries, so escaped the 'modernisation' experienced by many other country houses. Highlights include the **Chapel**; the **Long Gallery**, bathed by natural light; and the vast **Banqueting Hall**, virtually unchanged since the days of Henry VIII.

The house is 2 miles south of Bakewell on the A6. You can get there on any bus heading for Matlock (every 30 minutes) or walk along the footpath through the fields mostly on the east side of the river.

Chatsworth

The great stately home, manicured gardens and perfectly landscaped park of Chatsworth together form a major highlight for many visitors to Britain. The main draw is sumptuous **Chatsworth House** (☎ 01246-582204; www.chatsworth.org; adult/child £9.75/3.50; 🕑 11am-5.30pm Mar-Dec). Known as the 'Palace of the Peak', this vast edifice has been occupied by the dukes of Devonshire for centuries. The original house was started in 1551 by the inimitable Bess of Hardwick; a little later came Chatsworth's most famous guest, Mary Queen of Scots. She was imprisoned here on and off between 1570 and 1581 at the behest of Elizabeth I, under the guard of Bess' fourth husband, the earl of Shrewsbury. The **Scots bedrooms** (adult/child incl admission to the house £12.40/4.95), nine Regency rooms named after the imprisoned queen, are sometimes open to the public.

The house was extensively altered between 1686 and 1707, and again enlarged and improved in the 1820s; much of what you see dates from these periods. Among the prime attractions are the painted and decorated ceilings, although the 30 or so rooms are all treasure-troves of splendid furniture and magnificent artworks.

The house is surrounded by 25 sq miles of **gardens** (adult/child £6/2.75), complete with a fountain so high it can be seen when you're miles away in the hills of the Dark Peak. For the kids an **adventure playground** (admission £4.50) provides hours of fun. Beyond that is another 400 hectares of parkland, originally landscaped by Capability Brown, open to the public for walking and picnicking.

Chatsworth is 3 miles northeast of Bakewell. If you're driving, it's £1.50 to park. The only direct bus service from Bakewell runs on a Sunday (215, seven times daily). Virgin Trains runs a bus between Macclesfield, Buxton and Bakewell (two per day) that extends to Chatsworth June through September.

Another option is to walk or cycle from Bakewell. Start out on the quiet lane that leads uphill from the old train station; walkers can take footpaths through Chatsworth park via the mock-Venetian village of Edensor (ensor), and cyclists can pedal via Pilsley.

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Mid Wales

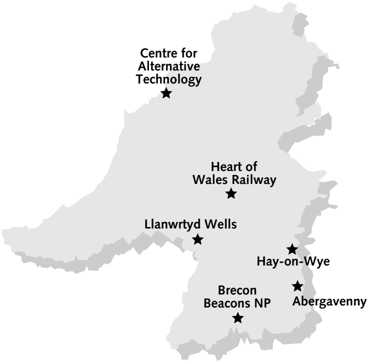
Generations of visitors have traditionally viewed Mid Wales as a staging post en route to elsewhere. Stuck between the splendour of Snowdonia in the north and the golden coast of Pembrokeshire in the south, this vast swath of Welsh countryside has become used to playing third fiddle. But to overlook the country's heart is to miss some classically British wonders. The Brecon Beacons National Park is the smooth, pastel-hued contrast to north Wales' serrated peaks, and is an atmospheric introduction to what lies in store. This is an area of rolling hills, patchwork fields and tiny villages that comprise rural Wales, where more than half the population speaks the mother tongue.

Coastal Aberystwyth is the biggest town and is home to a buzzing university. Inland, solid little Machynlleth was the 'ancient capital of Wales', more famous today for the sustainable living project at the nearby Centre for Alternative Technology, which promotes a green way of life. Towards the English border, charming Hay-on-Wye is the secondhand book capital of the world, Welshpool boasts impressive Powis Castle and Abergavenny plays home to the Green Man Festival, Wales' number one music festival. The long-distance walking trail Offa's Dyke Path roughly follows the border and gives a glimpse of how these parts have merged. And wherever you go in this fertile region, you're never far from a plate of superb locally produced food.

Wales wouldn't be Wales without trains, so hop aboard the narrow-gauge Vale of Rheidol Steam Railway or, for the country's most scenic commuter ride, grab a window seat on the renowned Heart of Wales line.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the rolling landscapes of the **Brecon Beacons** (p693)
- Riding the rails on the scenic **Heart of Wales line** (p694)
- Getting literary at book-mad **Hay-on-Wye** (p703)
- Becoming bogged down in silly sports at loopy **Llanwrtyd Wells** (p705)
- Soaking up the vibe at the **Green Man Festival** (see boxed text, p701) near Abergavenny
- Discovering the sustainable hippy dream of the **Centre for Alternative Technology** (see boxed text, p709)



- POPULATION: 201,728
- AREA: 2696 SQ MILES

Orientation & Information

The Mid Wales region stretches west from the Welsh–English border to Cardigan Bay on the coast, encompassing the Brecon Beacons in the south and parts of Snowdonia in the north.

It includes just two counties: Powys and Ceredigion. The former was created in 1974 when Brecknockshire, Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire were combined during local-government reorganisations. Cardiganshire maintained its boundaries but reverted to its ancient name, Ceredigion.

Activities

Walking in the Brecon Beacons might be the focus of outdoor life, but Mid Wales is chock-full of other lung-bursting activities.

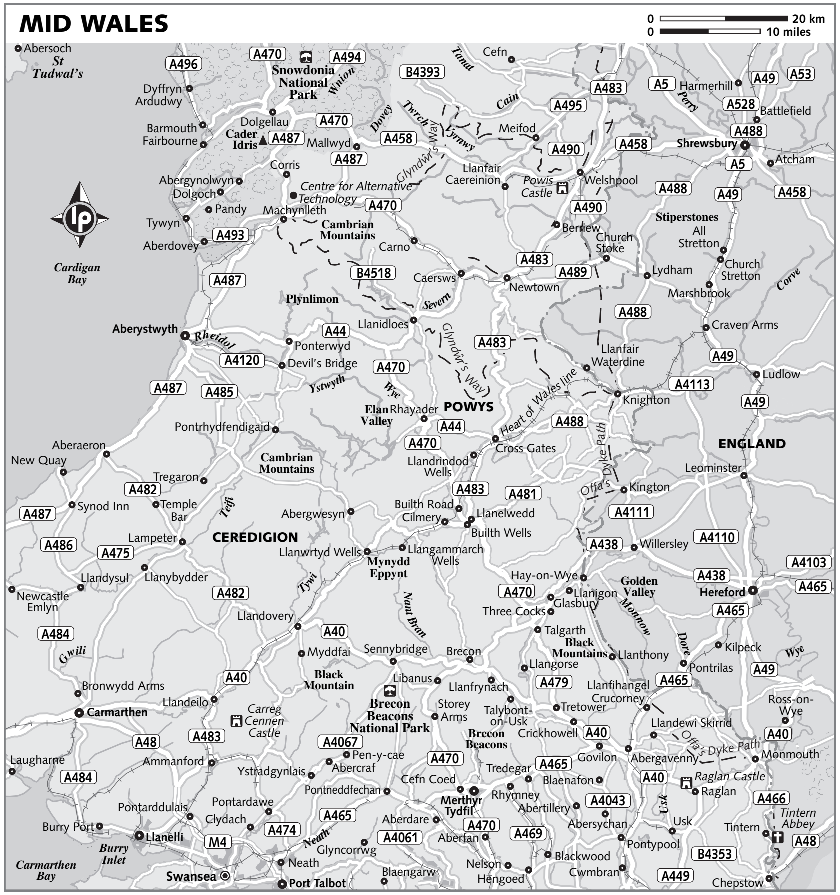
With plenty of challenging hills, road **cycling** and **mountain biking** are popular, while several farms operate **pony trekking** in the mountains. The fine peaks and reliable thermals offer good **hang-gliding** and **paragliding**, and **mountainboarding** is growing in popularity.

The Rivers Wye and Usk are renowned for excellent **fishing**, or just paddle along the placid Wye for ideal **canoeing**.

See the sections on Brecon Beacons National Park, Powys and Ceredigion in this chapter for full details. Tourist offices stock comprehensive details of all local activities.

Getting Around

In an age of high-speed motorways, Mid Wales seems stuck in a time warp. The A470 is the closest thing to a highway between the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia, and with progress frequently slowed by tractors and lumbering trucks you have no choice but to relax and enjoy the view.


MID WALES
0 20 km
0 10 miles
Abersoch
St Tudwal's
A496
A470
A494
Snowdonia National Park
Cefn
B4393
Dyffryn Ardudwy
Barmouth
Fairbourne
Dolgellau
Cader Idris
A487
Mallwyd
A470
A458
Meifod
A495
A483
A5
Harmerhill
A49
A53
A528
Battlefield
A488
Shrewsbury
A5
Atcham
A490
A458
Corris
A487
Abergynolwyn
Dolgoch
Centre for Alternative Technology
Llanfair Caereinion
Powis Castle
Welshpool
A488
A49
A458
Tywyn
Pandy
Machynlleth
A470
Cambrian Mountains
A490
Stiperstones
Aberdovey
A493
Berriew
Church Stoke
All Stretton
Carno
Cardigan Bay
A483
A489
Lydham
Church Stretton
A487
B4518
Caersws
Newtown
Marshbrook
Plynlimon
A488
Craven Arms
Aberystwyth
Rheidol
A44
Llanidloes
Ponterwyd
A483
Llanfair Waterdine
A49
A4120
Devil's Bridge
A470
Ludlow
A487
A485
Ystwyth
Wye
POWYS
Knighton
A4113
A49
Elan Valley
Rhayader
Heart of Wales line
A488
Pontrhydfendigaid
A44
Glyndŵr's Way
ENGLAND
Aberaeron
A470
Cross Gates
New Quay
Cambrian Mountains
Llandrindod Wells
Offa's Dyke Path
Leominster
Tregaron
A483
A481
Kington
A482
Synod Inn
Temple Bar
Teifi
A487
Abergwesyn
Builth Road
Cilmery
Llanelwedd
A4111
A486
Lampeter
CEREDIGION
Builth Wells
A438
Willersley
A4110
A475
Llanwrtyd Wells
Llangammarch Wells
A4103
Llandysul
Llanybydder
Mynydd Eppynt
Hay-on-Wye
Golden Valley
A438
Newcastle Emlyn
A482
Tywi
A470
Llanigon
Glasbury
Hereford
A465
Llandovery
Nant Bran
Three Cocks
Monnow
A465
A484
A40
Talgarth
Dore
Kilpeck
Gwili
Myddfai
Sennybridge
Brecon
Black Mountains
Llanthony
Pontrilas
A49
Wye
A40
Black Mountain
Llangorse
Bronwydd Arms
Libanus
Llanfrynach
A479
Llanfihangel Crucorney
A465
Carmarthen
Llandeilo
Carreg Cennen Castle
Brecon Beacons National Park
Storey Arms
Talybont-on-Usk
Tretower
Ross-on-Wye
A48
A483
A4067
Brecon Beacons
Crickhowell
A40
Llandewi Skirrid
A40
Laugharne
Ammanford
Pen-y-cae
A470
Abercraf
Tredegar
A465
Govilon
Abergavenny
Offa's Dyke Path
Monmouth
A484
Ystradgynlais
Cefn Coed
A40
Raglan Castle
Raglan
Pontneddfechan
Blaenafon
Usk
Pontarddulais
Pontardawe
Merthyr Tydfil
Rhymney
A4043
A466
Clydach
A465
Aberdare
Abertillery
Tintern Abbey
Burry Port
Llanelli
A474
A470
Abersychan
Tintern
Neath
A4061
Aberfan
A469
Usk
A48
M4
Glyncorrwg
Pontypool
Burry Inlet
Neath
Nelson
Blackwood
B4353
Carmarthen Bay
Swansea
Port Talbot
Blaengarw
Hengoed
Cwmbran
A449
Chepstow

Public transport is reliable and all tourist offices stock detailed timetables – check details with **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk). An extensive bus network is in operation, but Sunday services are usually limited (especially in more-remote areas).

Trains are less regular; for details contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk). The Cambrian Main Line runs between Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth via Machynlleth. The hours pass quickly riding the scenic **Heart of Wales line** (see the boxed text, p694), skirting the Brecon Beacons and crossing lush Mid Wales diagonally.

The multiday North & Mid Wales Rover (www.walesflexipass.co.uk; £30) offers three days' bus and train travel in seven days, and the North & Mid Wales Day Ranger (www.nationalrail.co.uk; £20) covers one day's travel for trains (other than the Heart of Wales line). Buy these passes from **Arriva Trains** (☎ 0870 9000 777), on the websites listed, or at most railway stations.

For travel in Powys, see p705, and for Ceredigion, see p710.

BRECON BEACONS

BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK (PARC CENEDLAETHOL BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG)

Soaring majestically in a wave of dappled pastel tones, the Brecon Beacons roll in a sea of greens, blues, reds and browns across a large slice of Mid Wales. Three distinct regions border the park: the industrial valleys to the south, the central farming heartland to the north and the English border to the east. Swaddled with grassy moors and uplands, the Beacons provide a striking contrast to rock-strewn Snowdonia in the north, but offer comparable thrills and excitement.

Walking is a major activity here. Two long-distance paths traverse the park: Offa's Dyke Path, along the eastern border, and the Taff Trail, which heads south from Brecon.

For adventure-seekers, the park offers top opportunities for rock climbing, hang-gliding, paragliding, mountainboarding, horse riding, caving and mountain biking, while touring cyclists can pedal the national pan-Wales route, the Lôn Las Cymru (see the boxed text, p651).

For a little aquatic fun, take to the water on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, or splosh away on the placid River Wye.

Feeling hungry? Most people have heard horror stories about British grub – that it's fatty, flaccid and flavourless – but this is a fantastic region to dispel such food-based falsehoods. Some of Wales' most succulent lamb frolics here, and farmers produce magnificent organic vegetables.

The park runs a mere 15 miles north to south and 45 miles west to east, but embraces four mountain ranges. The name derives from the central and highest range of the quartet, the Brecon Beacons themselves, the high point of which is Pen-y-Fan (886m). South is Fforest Fawr (Great Forest), whose tumbling streams join the River Neath to empty into Swansea Bay. To the west, the quieter Black Mountain range peaks at Fan Brycheiniog (802m), and to the east (don't get confused) are the popular Black Mountains (plural) and Waun Fach (811m).

Brecon, Abergavenny and Hay-on-Wye make good base towns, each with a wide range of accommodation and dining options. The closest train stations are Abergavenny and Merthyr Tydfil. The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal follows the valley of the River Usk from Brecon via Abergavenny down to the coast.

Lying 30 miles from the M4 Severn Bridge near Bristol, the park is easily reached from southern England, and as a result is a popular destination on weekends and public holidays.

Information

The park website is www.breconbeacons.org. The **National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01874-623366; Mountain Centre, Libanus; 🕘 9.30am-5pm Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, to 5.30pm May & Jun, to 6pm Jul & Aug, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb) is in open countryside near the village of Libanus, 5 miles southwest of Brecon off the A470. Trails from the centre, an award-winning tearoom and fine views of Corn Du (873m) make it a much-visited place.

There are three other dedicated park information centres:

Abergavenny (☎ 01873-853254; 🕘 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct) South of the Black Mountains, sharing space with the town tourist office.

Craig-y-Nos Country Park Forest Centre (☎ 01639-730395; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun May, 10am-6pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7pm Fri-Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) Beautiful forest and valley setting between Black Mountain and Fforest Fawr.

Llandovery (☎ 01550-720693; 🕑 10am-1pm & 1.45-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-1pm & 1.45-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Easter) North of Black Mountain.

Brecon Beacons National Park Welcome! is a useful free booklet of activities, sights and accommodation. Pick it up at any information centre.

Activities

ACTIVITY CENTRES

You can energise yourself with these outdoor specialists:

Black Mountain Activities (☎ 01497-847897; www.blackmountain.co.uk; Three Cocks; courses £37.50-89) White-water kayaking, caving, climbing, biking, orienteering and abseiling. Also arranges accommodation.

Llangorse Multi Activity Centre (☎ 01874-658272; www.activityuk.com; Gilfach Farm, Llangorse; per 2-hr session £15-31) Gorge-scrambling, horse riding, indoor climbing wall and a 2km-long zip-wire, the 'SkyTrek', which whooshes around the trees. Also bunk, B&B and camp site accommodation.

CANAL CRUISING

The 33-mile Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal was built to transport coal and iron to the sea. Take a narrowboat from Brecon down the valley of the River Usk to Abergavenny, continuing to Pontypool. There are six locks on the canal, and one 22-mile section that is lock-free.

Try a 2½-hour pleasure trip from Brecon (starting outside the Theatr Brycheiniog) with **Dragonfly Cruises** (☎ 07831-685222; www.dragonfly-cruises.co.uk; cruise £6), which runs one or two cruises two to five days per week from March to September and one cruise two days per week in October – call for daily sailings; or pick up a motorboat from **Brecon Boats** (☎ 01874-676401; Travellers Rest Inn, Talybont-on-Usk; boat hire per 2/4/6hr £20/30/50).

For a longer visit, self-pilot a narrowboat from **Cambrian Cruisers** (☎ 01874-665315; www.cambriancruisers.co.uk; Ty Newydd, Pencelli; boats from £496 for 3 nights) or **Beacon Park Boats** (☎ 01873-858277; www.beaconparkboats.com; The Boathouse, Llanfoist; boats from £390 for 3 nights).

CAVING & SHOWCAVES

Hidden beneath the Beacons are some of Britain's longest and deepest cave systems, lying mainly to the south in the Upper Swansea Valley and in the Llangattock hillside above Crickhowell. Tourist offices stock information, but unless you are an experienced spelunker you should stick to an organised trip with an activity centre (see left).

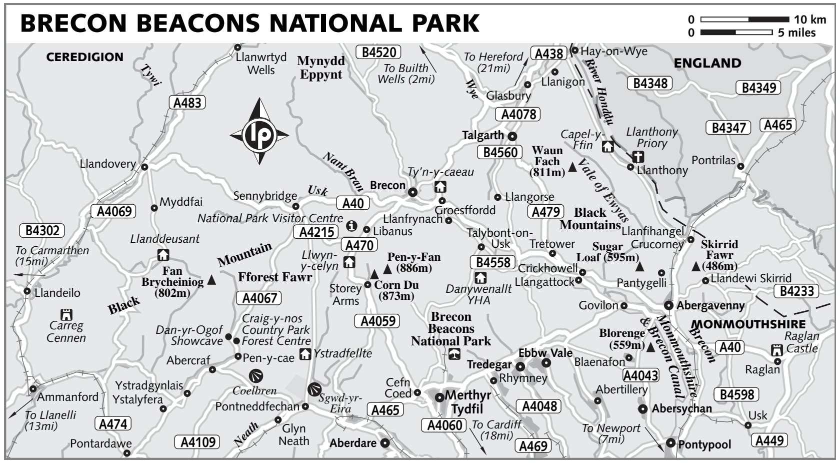
Discovered in 1912, superb **Dan-yr-Ogof** (☎ 01639-730284; www.showcaves.co.uk; adult/child £10/6.50; 🕑 10am-3pm Easter-Oct) features three separate caverns; kids love the flashy light show, together with the dinosaur park and shire horses. Dan-yr-Ogof lies 16 miles south of Brecon, off the A4067 north of Abercraf.

RAIL THROUGH THE HEART

The **Heart of Wales line** (☎ 01597-822053; www.heart-of-wales.co.uk) is one of Wales' most scenic stretches of railway. Like many other British rural lines, its existence was threatened by governmental policy in the 1960s, but the joint efforts of locals and train buffs saved the service.

The single-carriage shunter, described fondly by Bill Bryson as the 'little train', travels through beautiful river valleys and green-bathed hills as it cuts diagonally across central Wales, en route from Swansea on the south coast to Shrewsbury in the English borderlands. Stately Victorian spa towns are a feature of the line, as are the six tunnels and seven bridges that burrow and span the hills and valleys.

The highlight of the line lies between Llandeilo and Llandrindod Wells, where the train pulls up the Sugar Loaf mountain and rolls across the graceful Cynghordy Viaduct through prime red kite country. The full 121-mile, 3¾-hour trip breaks down easily into shorter sections, such as Swansea–Llandrindod Wells (return £12.70, 2¼ hours), Llandeilo–Llandrindod Wells (return £7.40, 1¼ hours) and Llandovery–Knighton (return £8.90, 1½ hours). A 48-hour rover ticket offering unlimited travel on the line costs £20. There are four trains Monday to Saturday, two on summer Sundays and one on Sunday in winter. The walking guide *Great Walks from the Heart of Wales Railway* is available from tourist offices and details 15 circular routes from stations on the line.


BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK
0 10 km
0 5 miles
CEREDIGION
Tywi
Llanwrtyd Wells
Mynydd Eppynt
B4520
To Builth Wells (2mi)
To Hereford (21mi)
A438
Hay-on-Wye
ENGLAND
Llanigon
Wye
Glasbury
River Honddu
B4348
B4349
A483
A4078
Talgarth
Capel-y-Ffin
Llanthony Priory
B4347
A465
Llandovery
Nant Bran
B4560
Waun Fach (811m)
Llanthony
Pontrilas
Ty'n-y-caeau
Brecon
Llangorse
Vale of Ewyas
Myddfai
Sennybridge
Usk
A40
Groesffordd
A479
Black Mountains
A4069
National Park Visitor Centre
Llanfrynach
Libanus
Talybont-on-Usk
Llanfihangel Crucorney
Skirrid Fawr (486m)
B4302
A4215
Tretower
Sugar Loaf (595m)
To Carmarthen (15mi)
Llanddeusant
Mountain
Llwyn-y-celyn
A470
Pen-y-Fan (886m)
B4558
Crickhowell
Llangattock
Pantygelli
Llandewi Skirrid
Fan Brycheiniog (802m)
Fforest Fawr
Storey Arms
Corn Du (873m)
Danywenallt YHA
B4233
Llandeilo
Black
A4067
Govilon
Abergavenny
Carreg Cennen
A4059
Brecon Beacons National Park
Blorenge (559m)
Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal
MONMOUTHSHIRE
Dan-yr-Ogof Showcave
Craig-y-nos Country Park Forest Centre
A40
Raglan Castle
Abercraf
Pen-y-cae
Ystradfellte
Tredegar
Ebbw Vale
Blaenafon
Raglan
Coelbren
A4043
Ammanford
Ystradgynlais
Ystalyfera
Cefn Coed
Rhymney
Abertillery
Sgwd-yr-Eira
Merthyr Tydfil
B4598
To Llanelli (13mi)
Pontneddfechan
A465
A4048
Abersychan
A474
Neath
Glyn Neath
A4060
To Cardiff (18mi)
To Newport (7mi)
Usk
Pontardawe
A4109
Aberdare
A469
Pontypool
A449

CLIMBING

Climbing in the park focuses on Llangattock, Craig-y-dinas (Dinas Rock) near Pontneddfechan, and Morlais Quarry, near Merthyr Tydfil.

For an introduction to climbing or simply a bit of aerial fun, you can climb, abseil and zip through the sky on high wires at **Llangorse Multi Activity Centre** (☎ 01874-658272; www.activityuk.com; Gilfach Farm, Llangorse).

CYCLING

The 77-mile Taff Trail runs between Cardiff and Brecon. The mountain section, from Merthyr Tydfil to Talybont-on-Usk, crosses the heart of the park, climbing to 450m.

Great mountain biking is possible throughout the park, with 15 easy and hard routes compiled on map leaflets (£7) produced by the national park. Guided routes in the southern Beacons can be organised through **Hobo Backpackers Mountain Biking** (☎ 01495-718422; www.hobo-backpackers.com), which operates from its hostel in Tredegar.

Bike hire in and around Brecon:

Bicycle Beano (☎ 01982-560471; www.bicycle-beano.co.uk) Leads guided tours in and around the Brecon Beacons and Wye Valley. Trips are irregular, so book well in advance.

Bikes & Hikes (☎ 01874-610071; www.bikesandhikes.co.uk; 10 The Struet, Brecon; per half-/full day £14/18) Rentals, sales, routes and tours.

Bi-Ped Cycles (☎ 01874-622296; www.bipedcycles.co.uk; 10 Ship St, Brecon; per half-/full day £13/16) Another mountain-bike rental crowd in Brecon.

Touring cyclists enjoy the Welsh national cycle route, the **Lôn Las Cymru** (see the boxed text, p651).

For more detailed information, see www.cyclebreconbeacons.com and www.mtbbreconbeacons.com.

From late May to mid-September, on Sunday and Bank Holidays, the national park runs the Beacons Bus, including a 'Bike Bus' (p697).

FISHING

The waters of the Rivers Wye and Usk spawn fine sport for anglers; fish for prime Atlantic salmon, pike, carp or trout.

For tuition from an old hand with 30 years' experience, try Builth Wells–based **Rods and Reels** (☎ 01982-551706; www.rods-n-reelsonline.co.uk; Kings Head Lane, Broad St; tuition from £20 per person).

For more information see www.fishing.visitwales.com and www.wyeuskfoundation.org.

GLIDING & PARAGLIDING

Great ridge- and wave-soaring make the park a destination for aerial-sports fans.

Black Mountains Gliding Club (☎ 01874-711463; www.talgarthgc.co.uk), near Talgarth, offers trial lessons as well as intensive courses.

For paragliding, **Axis Paragliding & Paramotoring** (☎ 01873 850111; www.paraglide.co.uk; 35 Mount St, Abergavenny) will give you tuition or take you on a tandem flight from its base in Abergavenny.

MOUNTAINBOARDING

Big boards, chunky wheels and a steep hill are all you need to practise this relatively new sport, a cross between skateboarding and snowboarding. Slalom, jump or speed along at the **Greenman Mountainboard Centre** (☎ 01874-636202; www.greenman-mountainboard.co.uk; per hr £6; 🕐 Sat & Sun Easter-Oct), 4 miles west of Brecon.

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

The Brecon Beacons have a vast choice of riding options:

Cantref Riding Centre (☎ 01874-665223; www.cantref.com; Upper Cantref Farm, Cantref; per hr £13, per half-/full day £20/40) Mountain, farm or forest trails near Brecon.

Grange Pony Trekking (☎ 01873-890215; www.grangetrekking.co.uk; Capel-y-Ffin, Abergavenny; per hr £12, per half-/full day £20/32) In the heart of the Black Mountains, at pretty Capel-y-Ffin.

Llanthony Riding & Trekking (☎ 01873-890359; www.llanthony.co.uk; Court Farm, Llanthony; per half-/full day £18/36) Gentle treks and demanding mountain rides, stopping at the pub for lunch.

Tregoyd Mountain Riders (☎ 01497-847351; www.tregoydriding.co.uk; Three Cocks; per hr £14, per half-/full day £22/40) Mountain-riding outfit that also offers B&B, bunkhouse and camp-site accommodation, 4 miles southwest of Hay-on-Wye.

Visit www.horseridingbreconbeacons.com for more information.

WALKING

You could walk all summer in the park without repeating a route, such is the range of choice. From demanding mountain trails to afternoon canal-side strolls, many walks are detailed in leaflets available from park information centres and tourist offices. Guided walks are also available.

Before setting out on a mountain hike check the weather forecast – call **Weathercall** (☎ 0891 500414) or see www.metoffice.gov.uk/loutdoor/mountainsafety/brecon.html. Take waterproof clothing even if it's sunny and warm when you start. Carry food but don't share it with sheep and ponies – they become attracted to cars on the roads, which can cause accidents.

For information on Beacons Bus services around the park see opposite.

Pen-y-Fan & Corn Du

The park's classic and heavily overused summit walk is to the ridgeline peaks of Pen-y-Fan or Corn Du, dubbed 'the motorway' by wardens due to its high volume of traffic. The walk starts at the car park at the Storey Arms (no longer a pub) on the A470 Merthyr Tydfil–Brecon road, but routes such as the return trip from the Llwyn-y-celyn YHA hostel (three hours) or Brecon (five to six hours) may be more enjoyable.

Due north of Corn Du is the wonderfully named Llyn Cwm Llwch (pronounced khlin coom khlooch), a little lake within a glacial amphitheatre that offers more gentle alternatives to the mountain trails.

Taff Trail

Running from Cardiff to Brecon, largely along canal towpaths and disused railway lines, the most scenic section of this 77-mile route lies in the national park.

Canal Walks

The park's most straightforward walks follow the towpath of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal along the valley of the River Usk. The 20-mile Abergavenny–Brecon section is popular, or tackle the full 33-mile length from Brecon to Pontypool.

Around Abergavenny

Some fine hills rise in the park's southeast near Abergavenny, including Sugar Loaf (595m), Blorenge (559m) and Skirrid Fawr (486m).

Black Mountains

Offa's Dyke Path affords stunning views. Some of the best are on the exposed 17-mile ridge of the Black Mountains (the park's eastern region) between Pandy and Hay-on-Wye, above the Vale of Ewyas (Llanthony Valley; p702).

Follow the valley bottom along the River Honddu (hon-thee) from Llanfihangel Crucorney in the south of the mountains for a less demanding alternative.

Fforest Fawr & Waterfall Walks

Famous for the lush, steep-sided gorges of the Rivers Hepste, Mellte and Nedd Fechan, the southern part of this region has several fine waterfalls. The best is 8m-high **Sgwd-yr-Eira** (Waterfall of the Snow) on the Hepste, where you can actually walk behind the torrent. This walk and others are relatively close together on a stretch between Ystradfellte and Pontneddfechan.

In the north, the terrain is more akin to the bleak, open fells of the Brecon Beacons.

Black Mountain

Wilder and less frequented than other areas of the park, Black Mountain lies in the extreme west of the Brecon Beacons, near the border with Carmarthenshire. The highest point, Fan Brycheiniog, can be reached via a path leading from the roadside just north of the Dan-yr-Ogof showcave (p694).

Sleeping

Plenty of accommodation is available in and around the national park. While B&Bs are usually the best bet, there are some fine guesthouses in Abergavenny and Hay-on-Wye, at either end of the Black Mountains.

There are five YHA hostels within the national park:

Brecon (Ty'n-y-caeau; ☎ 0870 770 5718; brecon@yha.org.uk; Groesffordd; dm £14; 🕐 daily by advance booking) Large former country house, 2.5 miles east of Brecon. Self-catering facilities, small shop and catering available.

Capel-y-Ffin (☎ 0870 770 5748; capelyffin@yha.org.uk; dm £11; 🕐 daily by advance booking) Remote former hill farm, 8 miles south of Hay-on-Wye amid the Black Mountains. Ideally placed for Offa's Dyke Path and national cycle trails. Self-catering facilities and meals available.

Danywenallt (☎ 0870 770 6136; danywenallt@yha.org.uk; dm £17.50; 🕐 daily by advance booking) This ex-farmhouse has a lovely location in countryside near Talybont-on-Usk, 8 miles south of Brecon. Self-catering facilities and meals available.

Llanddeusant (☎ 0870 770 5930; llanddeusant@yha.org.uk; dm £11; 🕐 with 48hr notice Easter-Oct) A real get-away-from-it-all hostel, below the western Black Mountain. Self-catering only; nearest shop 7 miles away.

Llwyn-y-celyn (☎ 0870 770 5936; llwynycelyn@yha.org.uk; dm £14; 🕐 with 48hr notice Easter-Oct) Self-catering facilities and meals available at this old farmhouse directly below the central Beacons, by the A470 Merthyr Tydfil–Brecon road.

There are also more than 20 independent bunkhouses and hostels in the area, but as many cater primarily for groups it is best to book in advance. Contact tourist offices for a full list or visit www.hostelswales.com.

With the permission of the farmer or landowner, it may be possible to camp almost anywhere in the park, but not on National Trust (NT) land. Tourist offices list camping grounds in the leaflet *Camping on Farms* (25p).

Getting There & Around

It takes three to four hours to drive to the Brecon Beacons from London, via Newport and the A4042 to Abergavenny.

Regular bus services to the national park towns are good, but few run on Sunday.

Buses X3 and X4 (1½ hours, at least hourly) travel from Cardiff to Abergavenny (the X4 via Merthyr Tydfil). Bus 39 (55 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday) runs between Hay-on-Wye and Brecon; and bus 63 (£6.10, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday) travels between Swansea and Brecon. For more information on bus services contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk).

From late May to mid-September, on Sunday and Bank Holidays, the **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) operates several routes in and around the park. With a central hub in Brecon, the most popular services are the B1 from Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil (also known as the 'Bike Bus'; this has a trailer for cycles); B2 from Swansea; B5 shuttle from Brecon to the National Park Visitor Centre (Mountain Centre) and back; B8 from Abergavenny and B10 from Carmarthen. The services are subsidised and, as such, routes and timetables can change significantly from one year to the next. Call or visit the website for the latest details.

The leaflet *Discover the Beacons – Take the Beacons Bus* has full timetables.

The only train services available are Cardiff–Merthyr Tydfil (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday) and Newport–Abergavenny (25 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday).

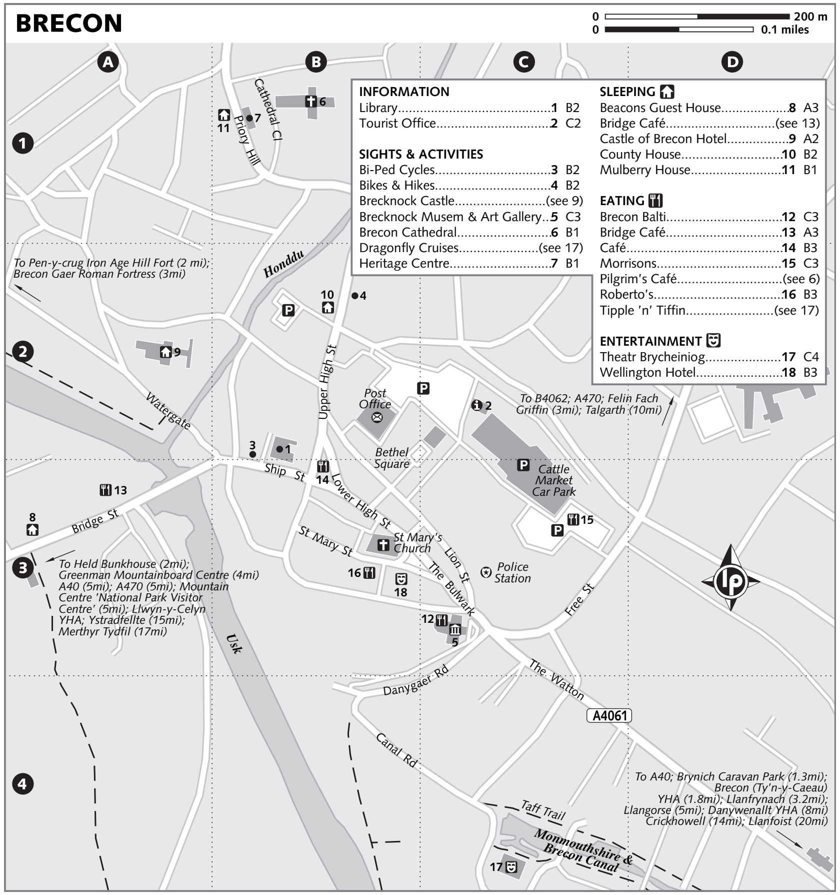
BRECON (ABERHONDDU)

☎ 01874 / pop 7901

Muscular-looking stone buildings, winding streets and a languid river may mark Brecon as traditionally Welsh, but it's the town's location at the hub of the national park that draws visitors. With a good range of accommodation and visitor facilities, it has an energetic buzz and is busy year-round.

The main attractions in town are the sedate cathedral and renowned Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery. Brecon also hosts an internationally famous jazz festival, and has a clutch of intriguing craft shops and galleries.

Northwest of town, the remains of an Iron Age hill fort lie atop Pen-y-crug, while those


BRECON
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Cathedral Cl
Priory Hill
To Pen-y-crug Iron Age Hill Fort (2 mi); Brecon Gaer Roman Fortress (3mi)
Honddu
Upper High St
Post Office
To B4062; A470; Felin Fach Griffin (3mi); Talgarth (10mi)
Watergate
Bethel Square
Cattle Market Car Park
Ship St
Lower High St
Bridge St
St Mary's Church
St Mary St
Lion St
Police Station
The Bulwark
Free St
To Held Bunkhouse (2mi); Greenman Mountainboard Centre (4mi) A40 (5mi); A470 (5mi); Mountain Centre 'National Park Visitor Centre' (5mi); Llwyn-y-Celyn YHA; Ystradfellte (15mi); Merthyr Tydfil (17mi)
Usk
Danygaer Rd
The Watton
A4061
Canal Rd
To A40; Brynich Caravan Park (1.3mi); Brecon (Ty'n-y-Caeau) YHA (1.8mi); Llanfrynach (3.2mi); Llangorse (5mi); Danywenallt YHA (8mi) Crickhowell (14mi); Llanfoist (20mi)
Taff Trail
Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

of Brecon Gaer Roman Fort can be found 3 miles west. In Norman times, the local Welsh chieftain was overthrown by a Norman lord, Bernard de Newmarch, who built the town's castle and church (which later became the cathedral).

Orientation & Information

Everything in Brecon is within easy walking distance.

The **tourist office** (☎ 622485; brectic@powys.gov.uk; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar) is in the Cattle Market car park near Morrisons supermarket.

Log on for free at the **library** (☎ 623346; Ship St; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Tue, 9.30am-1pm Sat); booking recommended.

Sights

BRECON CATHEDRAL

Founded in 1093 as part of a Benedictine monastery, the **cathedral** (☎ 623857; admission free) exudes tranquillity, and is worth visiting also for the **Heritage Centre** (☎ 625222; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) and tasty Pilgrims Café (p700).

Parts of the cathedral nave are Norman. The tower, choir and transepts date from the 13th and 14th centuries, and in the mid-1860s the church was restored by Sir Gilbert Scott (architect of St Pancras Station in London). At the western end of the nave is the only stone cresset (an ancient lighting device) left in Wales; its 30 cups held oil for the cathedral's lamps.

BRECKNOCK MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Housed inside the town's former Shire Hall, this **museum and gallery** (☎ 624121; Captain's Walk; adult/child £1/free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, closed Sun Oct-Mar) is surprisingly interesting. Exhibits include an AD 800 dugout log canoe retrieved from Llangorse Lake and a collection of hand-carved Welsh lovespoons. The art gallery has changing exhibitions.

Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

The 77-mile **Taff Trail** walking and cycling route and 33-mile **Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal** both start in Brecon. The tourist office has details on these, and on all manner of walks in and around the Beacons. See also Canal Walks, p696.

Brecon lies at the northern end of the Taff Trail cycle route, which continues as the Lôn Las Cymru (see the boxed text, p651) north via Builth Wells. There is also excellent national park mountain biking nearby (p695).

Festivals & Events

Brecon is transformed for one weekend in mid-August when the world's foremost jazz players come to town. In a blaze of colour (and brass), the renowned annual **Brecon Jazz Festival** swings the town to its boots. Past headline acts have included stars such as Courtney Pine and US tenor-sax legend Chico Freeman. Contact the festival office at the **Theatr Brycheiniog** (☎ 611622; www.breconjazz.co.uk; Canal Rd) for more details.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Brynich Caravan Park (☎ 623325; www.brynich.co.uk; Brynich; 2-person tent sites low/mid-/high season from £8/9/10) Located 1.5 miles east of Brecon, this site has excellent facilities including a well-stocked shop and heated shower blocks. Take bus X43.

Held (☎ 624646; www.heldbunkhouse.co.uk; Cantref; dm £10.50) Two miles southeast of Brecon, surrounded by beautiful and classically British scenery, the Held is a clean and tidy converted barn with a well-equipped self-catering kitchen.

Brecon YHA hostel (Ty'n-y-caeau; ☎ 0870 770 5718; brecon@yha.org.uk; Groesffordd; dm £14; 🕑 daily by advance booking) Former country house, 2 miles east of Brecon. Take bus X43 to the Llanfrynach turning, and go north for a mile through Groesffordd. Or walk from Brecon via the pleasant canal-side path (about 40 minutes).

During the jazz festival, open areas in the town become makeshift camping grounds.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Bridge Café (☎ 622024; www.bridgecafe.co.uk; 7 Bridge St; s/d from £20/40; ☒) A revelation in the Brecon café scene, the Bridge also provides wonderful B&B accommodation. Spacious rooms have heavenly beds (feather pillows and Egyptian cotton sheets) and rustic colour schemes. Room 1 is the pick, with its own sofa and private bathroom.

County House (☎ 625844; 100 The Struet; s/d from £40/60; ☒) In a Grade II–listed Georgian town house below the cathedral, this old judge's residence features original oak and flagstone floors, with the emphasis on preserving the period elegance of the property.

Beacons (☎ 623339; www.beacons.brecon.co.uk; 16 Bridge St; s/d £40/52, without bathroom £35/40) Slightly faded, faintly floral and with an over-the-top four-poster room, this guesthouse isn't pushing contemporary style, but the welcome is heartfelt and rooms are more than comfortable.

Castle of Brecon Hotel (☎ 624611; www.breconcastle.co.uk; Castle Sq; s £50-74, d £60-85) Constructed on the remains of Brecknock Castle and favoured by older folk looking to indulge, this is the top hotel in town. Best described as flouncy, Beacon View rooms have the best outlook, while Castle Lodge rooms are kinder on the wallet (no bathtub or satellite TV). Check the website for special deals.

Felin Fach Griffin (☎ 620111; www.eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk; d from £97.50) Three miles north of Brecon, off the A470, this pub is a darling of the syrupy British style media, who swoon over its lush accommodation and food (lunch mains £5 to £10, dinner mains £14.50 to £17.). 'The service is beyond impeccable and the helpings are princely', gushed the *Daily Telegraph*. Such fawning is warranted; it is well worth a visit for dinner or an overnight treat.

Eating & Drinking

Bridge Café (☎ 622024; www.bridgecafe.co.uk; 7 Bridge St; dishes £1.25-6.50; 🕑 11am-6pm Wed-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun during Bank Holiday weekends & school holidays) Beautifully prepared organic food using local ingredients. Snacks from sandwiches to cakes, or try a full cooked breakfast or veggie special. The main salad bowls with organic bread are delicious, especially as you sink into the sofa with a coffee and newspaper.

Pilgrim's Café (☎ 610610; dishes £2-7; ⏰ 10am-5pm) In the cathedral close, quaint Pilgrim's does a range of scones, cakes, sandwiches and salads, as well as warm main dishes. The three-course Sunday lunch (£11.50) is good value, but booking is recommended.

Café (☎ 611191; 39 High St; snacks £3.40-5; ⏰ 10am-5pm Fri-Sun) Light, bright, spacious and airy, this is a great place to refuel. Scoff naughty cakes and tempting snacks, surrounded by fine local art.

Brecon Balti (☎ 624653; Glamorgan St; mains £4.15-11; ⏰ 6pm-midnight) If you're craving curry, get your fill of Indian treats at this subcontinental place, which also provides a takeaway service.

Tipple 'n' Tiffin (☎ 611866; Theatr Brycheiniog; mains £6-8; ⏰ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Brecon doesn't have a huge luvvy crowd, but theatre-goers hanging out here dine on delights such as char-grilled organic salmon or ragout of Mediterranean vegetables and organic pasta. Encore!

Roberto's (☎ 611880; mains £8-18; ⏰ 5.30-10pm Mon-Thu & Sun, 5.30-10.30pm Sat) Tiny Roberto's is the place to grab an Italian meal. Pizza, pasta and regional meat dishes are served up in the cosy interior and out on the decked terrace area.

Morrisons supermarket is next to the tourist office.

Entertainment

Canal-side **Theatr Brycheiniog** (☎ 611622; www.theatrbrycheiniog.co.uk; Canal Rd) is the town's drama and music venue, with an exhibition centre and the Tipple 'n' Tiffin restaurant. The bar at the Wellington Hotel (The Bulwark) hosts live music some evenings.

Getting There & Away

Bus services are good: the X43 stops en route from Abergavenny (50 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) to Cardiff (1½ hours, one on Sunday); buses 39 and 40 serve Hereford via Hay-on-Wye (55 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday); and bus 63 serves Swansea (£6.10, 1½ hours, three daily, none on Sunday).

National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080) runs buses to London (£22.50, six hours, one daily), with a change at Cardiff (1¼ hours).

Most **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254) and Bike Bus services stop in Brecon (see p697).

CRICKHOWELL (GRUG HYWEL)

☎ 01873 / pop 2000

Located on the A40 between Brecon and Abergavenny, this well-to-do little town glows amid pastel-hued houses and a burst of hanging flower baskets. Overlooked by Crug Hywel (Table Mountain) and with excellent food and accommodation, this makes a good base. The **tourist office** (☎ 812105; Beaufort St; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Easter-Oct) is on the main road.

The **Bear Hotel** (☎ 810408; www.bearhotel.co.uk; Beaufort St; mains £8-18.50) has a reputation that reaches far and wide, and rightly so. Dining here is an experience not to be missed – whether you choose oak-smoked salmon, local lamb or char-grilled pork, dishes are prepared to the highest standards using the freshest ingredients. The bedrooms (singles/doubles £58 to £77) aren't as great – very flowery and outdated – but for eating it's fantastic.

Two worthwhile B&Bs are the gorgeous 18th-century John Nash–designed house **Tŷ Gwyn** (☎ 811625; d from £50), with three double rooms, and the straightforward **Greenhill Villas** (☎ 811177; 2 Greenhill Villas, Beaufort St; d from £40), comfortably furnished but lacking en suite facilities.

At the pleasant **Riverside Caravan Park** (☎ 810397; New Rd; 2-person tent sites £12) you can camp by the town bridge.

ABERGAVENNY (Y FENNI)

☎ 01873 / pop 14,055

Although just outside the Brecon Beacons National Park, bustling Abergavenny makes a good base for exploring the surrounding hills (all *within* the park) and has a couple of its own attractions worth visiting.

Any tourist approaching through the wooded hills from the east will notice that Abergavenny is much more Welsh than anglicised Monmouth. The town's history dates back 400 years, but today Abergavenny is best known for its position at the heart of Wales' lauded cuisine scene, which celebrates the best in fresh and organic produce.

Lying in the Vale of Usk, the town is a good base for walking and outdoor pursuits. The Blaenafon World Heritage site (p666) is within easy striking distance, 8 miles southwest, up over the head of the valley.

Abergavenny is the only town in the north of the national park that has a railway station.

FINEST FESTIVAL

If you're fed up with the corporate music scene then the **Green Man Festival** (www.thegreenmanfestival.co.uk) could be for you.

Set in the rolling beauty of the Brecon Beacons National Park, the Green Man sits proudly at the forefront of the summer festival circuit. Launched in 2003 by Brecon-based duo It's Jo and Danny, the shindig celebrates the best of the alternative folk scene, pulling in bigger names each year as word of mouth spreads. Some 250 punters showed up for the first bash, but around 5000 rolled in to Glanusk Park near Crickhowell for the 2006 event.

Past line-ups read like a stellar who's who of the alternative scene: US alt-country kings Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Silver Jews and Calexico, Swedish-Argentinean songwriter José González, beguiling solo harpist Joanna Newsom, psychedelic British-Americans the Earlies, Scotland's finest modern folkers King Creosote and James Yorkston, old-timers Donavan and the Incredible String Band, Super Furry Animals front man Gruff Rhys and the loop-driven electronica of Four Tet and Tunng. Diverse just isn't the word.

Throw in some top-notch DJ action, theatre, cinema and creative kids' workshops and you've got the perfect festival ingredients. Go on, what are you waiting for?

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 857588; Swan Meadow, Monmouth Rd; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter) shares a building with the **National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 853254; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct).

The main post office is on Castle St. Go online for free at the **library** (☎ 735980; Victoria St; ⏰ closed Wed & Sun).

Sights

Modest-looking **St Mary's Church** is worth a stop even on a sunny day for its exceptional treasury of oak, stone and alabaster tombs, and carved Jesse tree, which shows the family lineage of Jesus. There's a free brochure, and a volunteer warden can answer questions. Make a donation if you can.

Abergavenny Castle overlooks the River Usk meadows and was the scene of Norman treachery in 1175 when William de Braose invited the local Welsh prince, Seisyll ap Dyfnwal, and his knights to dinner – and slaughtered them. In 1645 after several sieges, Royalist forces destroyed the castle beyond use. However, the keep was restored by the Victorians and now houses the small **Abergavenny Museum** (☎ 854282; admission free; ⏰ 11am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb), which features curios such as a replica set of medieval armour.

Activities

Abergavenny has plenty of canal and hill walks, mountain sports and cycle touring.

Fine views can be experienced with **walks** up Sugar Loaf, Blorenge and Skirrid Fawr, all close to Abergavenny. Details are available from the tourist office.

The **Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal** passes just near Llanfoist, southwest of town. Walk the towpath, or take an extended longboat break with **Beacon Park Boats** (☎ 01873-858277; www.beaconparkboats.com; The Boathouse, Llanfoist; boats from £390 for 3 nights).

This is a good area for **cycling** and **mountain biking**. Ride the gentle canal towpath 20 miles to Brecon, follow the disused railway line or take the hilly, road-based 32-mile **Four Castles** route (free leaflet from the tourist office). Mountain bikers can head for the Black Mountains.

Festivals & Events

The biggest celebration in Abergavenny's calendar is the **Food Festival** (www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com), held over a weekend in mid-September. Local producers and notable (British) celebrities come together to celebrate the best in regional grub, through a series of masterclasses, demonstrations, tastings, talks and guided walks.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Pyscodlyn Farm Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 853271; www.pyscodlyncaravanpark.com; Llanwenarth Citra; 2-person tent sites £10-12) Well maintained, with lush grass and generous tree coverage. Two miles west of town, off the A40.

Blacksheep Backpackers (☎ 859125; www.blacksheepbackpackers.co.uk; 24 Station Rd; dm £13.50, private r with bathroom per person £15, both incl breakfast; 💻) Although a bit rough around the edges, this laid-back hostel scores well with travellers, who rate its friendly welcome and comfy atmosphere.

The nearest YHA hostel is at Capel-y-Ffin (right), 15 miles north up the Vale of Ewyas.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Aenon House (☎ 858708; www.aenonhouse.co.uk; 34 Peny-y-pound Rd; s/d from £25/50; 🚭) With 200 years of history and happy hosts, Aenon House feels like a true home from home and, while rooms don't have en suite, you won't mind skipping across to the (usually) private bathroom before tucking in to a hearty home-cooked brekky.

Highfield House (☎ 852371; www.highfieldabergavenny.co.uk; 6 Belmont Rd; s/d £36/58) With extensive gardens, Highfield sits above town in a tasteful Victorian villa, providing views across to Sugar Loaf mountain. The three en suite rooms, named after local castles (Grosmont is the biggest and smartest), are welcoming, and you get the usual kettle and TV setup.

Angel Hotel (☎ 857121; www.angelhotelabergavenny.com; 15 Cross St; s/d from £60/85; 🚭) The traditional town inn was given a long-overdue face-lift a couple of years back. Now the rooms range from basic singles to swanky 'deluxe' suites with flat-screen TV, DVD player and luxury designer bathrooms. It's the swishest place in town, and comes with recommended dining as well (see below).

Eating

The Vale of Usk is renowned for the finest lamb, beef, venison, cheese, honey and wine in Wales, and Abergavenny and the surrounding villages have some fine dining.

Angel Hotel (☎ 857121; www.angelhotelabergavenny.com; 15 Cross St; bar & courtyard dishes £6-16, à la carte mains £11-17; 🕒 noon-2.30pm, 3-5pm & 7-10pm) This stylish bar and restaurant oozes calm throughout. If you can see past the Angel's tempting starters then main treats include roast lamb rump, wild sea bass or a sandwich of grilled vegetables, goat's cheese and pesto served on toasted beer bread. Afterwards, you might need to collapse into one of the Angel's comfy beds (see above).

Walnut Tree Inn (☎ 852797; mains £7.25-19.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) When original owner Franco Taruschio hung up his restaurateur gloves in 2001 after 35 years at the helm, this award-winning Italian place took a spectacular nose dive. Following severe reorganisation and a brutal dissection at the hands of potty-mouthed celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, it's now once again serving prime dishes. Expect the best, and if you don't get it, tell 'em f@&!in' Gordon sent you!

Malthouse (☎ 859960; Lion St; mains £8; 🕒 noon-9.30pm Tue-Sat) Hello, what's this? A rustic, wooden-floored bistro dishing up Mediterranean-inspired meat and fish dishes? Why yes, and it's pretty good as well, with a contemporary twist that's evident in dishes such as bacon-and-spinach pancake with tomato and parmesan sauce.

Llanwenarth Riverside Restaurant (☎ 810550; Brecon Rd; mains £9.25-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Attached to the Llanwenarth hotel, the elegant cream-and-brown styled dining room looks down over the river. Enjoy the restaurant's personal take on meat and fish dishes, such as pork tenderloin with a tart of black pudding and fig, served with rosemary sauce. Find it 3 miles northwest of Abergavenny on the A40.

Getting There & Away

Bus services from Monday to Saturday include the X3 to Cardiff (£6.30, 1½ hours, at least hourly), via Merthyr Tydfil (1½ hours); the X43 to Brecon (50 minutes, every two hours); and the 83 to Monmouth (one hour, four daily) via Raglan (35 minutes).

From late May to mid-September the Sunday-service Beacons Bus (p697) serves Abergavenny.

The train station is a 10-minute walk from the bus station and tourist office. Trains run about every hour (less often on Sunday) from Cardiff (£8.20, 45 minutes) via Newport (£5.40, 25 minutes).

AROUND ABERGAVENNY

Vale of Ewyas (Llanthony Valley)

Offa's Dyke Path runs atop the windblown eastern ridge of this lovely isolated vale. Down below, beside the babbling River Honddu, are the ruins of the 13th-century Augustinian priory church and the monastic buildings of **Llanthony Priory** (Cadw). A superb walk climbs from the car park to the bare ridge above.

Romantic **Abbey Hotel** (☎ 890487; d Sun-Thu £65, Fri & Sat £145) is built into the surviving abbey buildings, and offers five snug rooms in 12th-century surroundings.

Capel-y-Ffin YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5748; capelyffin@yha.org.uk; dm £11; 🕒 daily by advance booking), one mile north of Capel-y-Ffin village, is a basic hostel that suits walkers on Offa's Dyke Path. If you don't want to do the whole route, try the 8-mile section to Hay-on-Wye, or go riding at the adjacent **Grange Pony Trekking** (☎ 01873-890215; www.grangetrekking.co.uk; Capel-y-Ffin, Abergavenny; per hr £12, per half-/full day £20/32).

On summer Sundays Beacons Bus B7 runs between Hay-on-Wye and Llanthony Priory.

HAY-ON-WYE (Y GELLI)

☎ 01497 / pop 1400

If you're the type that never picks up a book (other than a travel guide, of course) then happy Hay-on-Wye could tip you over the edge, for this pretty little town by the River Wye is stuffed full with secondhand volumes. In more than 40 shops, hundreds of thousands of tomes are stacked floor to ceiling, covering every subject from bloody murder to decorative needlecraft, with a number of highly cherished rare and first editions.

Hay is also famous for book people. Richard Booth, the colourful chap whose vision turned the town into the used-book capital of the world, opened his own shop in the 1960s – Booths Books, stocked with cast-off libraries from various national institutions and country houses. The effect snowballed, others followed suit and since 1988 the town has hosted an influential Festival of Literature every May/June.

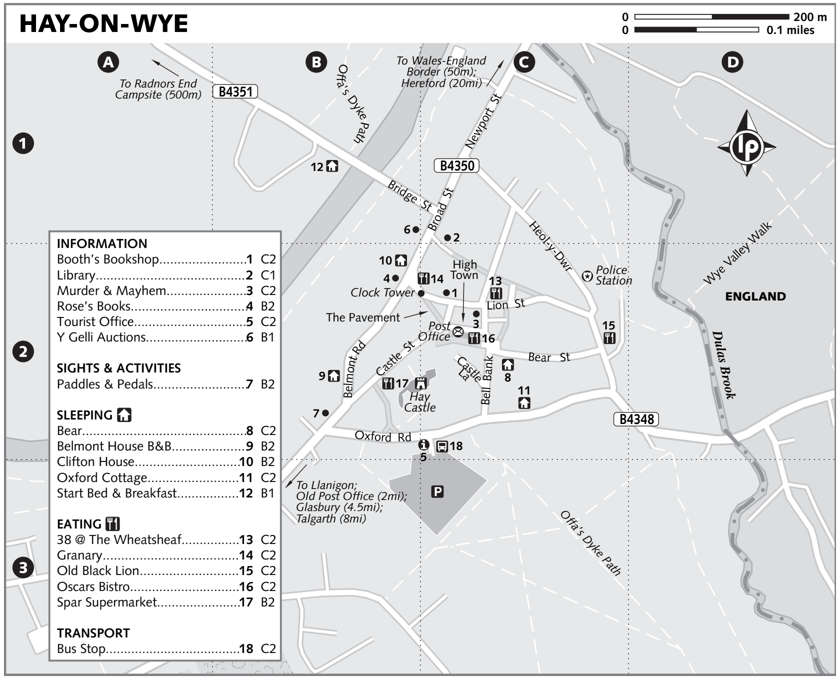
Situated below the Black Mountains, Hay also makes an excellent base for country pursuits. Canoe on the lovely River Wye, or walk Offa's Dyke Path and the Wye Valley Walk. Evenings are quiet, but there are some good places to eat.

Although packed with English folk, Hay is settled in Wales – the border runs 300m northeast of town.

Orientation & Information

Higgledy-piggledy Hay centres on a spider's web of confusing, crooked lanes. Most places of interest are central.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820144; Oxford Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Nov-Easter) is beside the main car park and bus stop. There's free internet access at the **library** (Chancery Lane; 🕒 10am-1pm, 2-4.30pm & 5-7pm Mon, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu & Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat).


HAY-ON-WYE
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Offa's Dyke Path
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Newport St
B4350
Bridge St
Broad St
Heol-y-Dwr
Police Station
Wye Valley Walk
ENGLAND
Dulas Brook
High Town
Clock Tower
The Pavement
Lion St
Post Office
Bear St
Castle St
Belmont Rd
Castle La
Bell Bank
Hay Castle
Oxford Rd
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Offa's Dyke Path
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Bookshops

Need something to read? Chances are you can get it in Hay. Here's a sneak preview:

Booth's Bookshop (☎ 820322; 44 Lion St) 400,000 tomes covering all subjects.

Murder & Mayhem (☎ 821613; 5 Lion St) Detective fiction, crime and horror.

Rose's Books (☎ 820013; 14 Broad St) Rare children's and illustrated books.

There are also regular sales at **Y Gelli Auctions** (☎ 821179; Broad St).

Ask at the tourist office if you have a special interest; there's probably a shop just for you.

Activities

Walking includes the historic town route, local countryside circuits and hikes through the Black Mountains. The tourist office stocks route literature.

For **canoeing** down the River Wye, hire craft and get a lift back from **Paddles & Pedals** (☎ 820604; Castle St; kayaks per half-/full day £15/20, 2-seater canoes per half-/full day £22.50/35), or from **Wye Valley Canoe Centre** (☎ 847213; www.wyevalleycanoes.co.uk; Glasbury; per half-/full day £12.50/20), whose boathouse lies four miles southwest of Hay.

Black Mountain Activities (☎ 847897; www.blackmountain.co.uk; Three Cocks) is 1 mile past Glasbury.

Festivals & Events

The week-long **Hay Festival of Literature** (☎ box office 821299; www.hayfestival.com; 25 Lion St) is Britain's leading literary get-together and swamps the town with more than 80,000 visitors.

Dozens of readings, lectures, concerts and workshops attract a diverse, artistic crowd. If you don't book accommodation well in advance, forget about staying anywhere close by.

In 2006, star names included poet Seamus Heaney, BBC correspondent Frank Gardner (wheelchair-bound after being shot by al-Qaeda) and the mysterious and elusive Lemony Snicket, author of the immensely popular *Series of Unfortunate Events*.

Such has been the impact of the festival that spin-offs have been held in Italy, Brazil and Colombia in recent years, while the children's festival, **Hay Fever**, runs simultaneously for two-year-olds and up.

Sleeping

Radnors End Campsite (☎ 820780; sites per person £5) Simple but smart camping site with rudimentary facilities, 500m across Hay Bridge.

Oxford Cottage (☎ 820008; www.oxfordcottage.co.uk; Oxford Rd; d without bathroom £44; ☒) The owners of this B&B don't actually live in-house, so this feels more like an upmarket hostel than a home. The three rooms are full of character – sloping, squeaky floors – but don't have en suite, although there are two bathrooms. If you don't mind making your own breakfast, this is a great option.

Belmont House B&B (☎ 820718; Belmont Rd; d £50, s/d without bathroom £25/45) Good value, but then not as swish as some others. A trip to Belmont House might feel like a visit to grandma's, such is the dated design of the interior.

Old Post Office (☎ 820008; www.oldpost-office.co.uk; Llanigon; d from £50; ☒) Owned by the folks from Oxford Cottage, this beautifully rustic place is 2 miles southwest of town near Offa's Dyke Path.

Clifton House (☎ 821618; www.cliftonhousehay.co.uk; Belmont Rd; s/d £35/55; ☒) Beneath the gaze of Hay's castle, Clifton House is a striking Georgian town house with airy, en suite rooms and a commendable policy of organic and environmentally friendly products.

Start Bed & Breakfast (☎ 821391; www.the-start.net; s/d £35/60; ☒) Peacefully set on the fringes of town, this beautiful 18th-century house is a five-minute walk across Hay Bridge. The rooms are a touch floral, but all have en suite, TV and kettle, and the setting is wonderful.

Bear (☎ 821302; www.thebearhay.co.uk; Bear St; d from £60, s/d without bathroom £26/52; ☒) Probably still Hay's finest, the Bear goes the extra mile. Crisp white sheets set against exposed stone walls and original beams, with a liberal sprinkling of books, make this former coaching inn a top-notch choice that also excels with organic, Fairtrade breakfasts.

The nearest YHA hostel is Capel-y-Ffin (p702), 8 miles south.

Eating

Granary (☎ 820790; Broad St; dishes £1.50-8; 🕐 10am-5.30pm year-round, 8am-9pm school holidays & festival) Old-world café-diner, specialising in wholefoods and serving possibly the biggest and best-value cakes ever. Veggie dishes are recommended and, with a huge upstairs gallery, you're likely to find a seat even when the rain's pouring.

38 @ The Wheatsheaf (☎ 820186; Lion St; mains £5.50-11; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Another wannabe gastropub with neutral décor. The food here is above average (if unsensational) and includes staples such as fish, curry, meat pies and pasta. The 38 Grill special should carry a health warning though: gammon, steak, black pudding, lamp chop, sausage, onion rings, tomato, chips, peas and a fried egg – you can just hear those arteries clogging.

Oscars Bistro (☎ 821193; High Town; mains £8-8.50; 🕐 10.30am-4.30pm) With generous sandwiches, vegetarian options and tasty local meat and fish dishes, Oscars has always been a popular option for a quick bite or something a little more leisurely.

One worthwhile pub is the **Old Black Lion** (☎ 820841; Lion St; mains £10.50-17.50), with interesting food such as Moroccan-lamb couscous with apricot and fig compote.

Spar supermarket is on Castle St.

Getting There & Away

Bus 39 stops en route between Hereford (£6.10, 55 minutes, about every two hours Monday to Friday, none on Sunday) and Brecon (40 minutes).

The summertime-Sundays Beacons Bus (p697) serves Hay from Hereford.

POWYS

Comprising two-thirds of Wales' scenic rural heartland, Powys is a region dominated by hills and valleys in a thousand shades of green. It is also the focus of the Welsh red kite community.

The region has very deep nationalistic roots. In medieval times it successfully fought off Norman invasion, and later formed part of the larger Pura Wallia ('under Welsh rule') area.

Today the county's verdant, peaceful undulations make it atmospheric walking and cycling country, through little towns blessed with character and otherworldly charm. Among a small grab of significant attractions, don't miss grand Powis Castle near Welshpool or the stimulating Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth.

Orientation & Information

Powys is the heart of Wales. Centrally located, it extends from the undulating English border west to Ceredigion, and from the Brecon Beacons north to the border with Snowdonia.

The county was created in 1974 by combining southern Brecknockshire, central Radnorshire and northern Montgomeryshire. The northern part is often still referred to as Montgomeryshire.

Activities

CYCLING

Several towns make good bases for mountain biking, including Llanwrtyd Wells and Machynlleth (p708), both with easy and hard local routes. Route maps are available at tourist offices.

WALKING

Powys is crossed by two national long-distance trails: Offa's Dyke Path (see p663) and Glyndŵr's Way.

Glyndŵr's Way is a 135-mile, eight- to 10-day path contained within Powys and based on sites related to Owain Glyndŵr, Wales' warrior-statesman famed for rebelling against English rule in the early 15th century. The trail draws a great chevron through beautiful countryside between Knighton and Welshpool in the east (both towns also lie on Offa's Dyke Path) via Machynlleth in the west.

For details on both walks, contact the **Offa's Dyke Centre** (☎ 01547-528753; www.offasdyke.demon.co.uk/odc.htm) in Knighton.

The most comprehensive information on these paths can be found on the website of the association of **National Trails** (www.nationaltrail.co.uk), including details on access, variation in landscape and route highlights.

Getting There & Around

Public transport is less prolific here than in other parts of Wales, so plan ahead. Tourist offices stock detailed timetables, or consult **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk).

On the trains, what you gain in scenery you lose in frequency. Routes include the Cambrian Main Line (Shrewsbury–Aberystwyth), connecting with the Cambrian Coaster at Machynlleth and continuing on to Pwllheli. The Heart of Wales line (Shrewsbury–Swansea; see boxed text, p694) runs across Powys and Mid Wales.

LLANWRTYD WELLS (LLANWRTYD)

☎ 01591 / pop 601

Bonkers Llanwrtyd (khlan-*oor*-tid) Wells is the daftest place in Mid Wales, with a series of events designed to keep it in the media spotlight.

KITE COMEBACK

In recent years a determined effort has been made to reintroduce the red kite to British skies. Once you've learned to identify its distinctive chestnut body and 2m wingspan, you can spot its aerial acrobatics all across remote Mid Wales.

Once the most common bird of prey throughout Britain, the kite found itself a victim of 16th-century agricultural expansion that led to it being ruthlessly hunted as vermin. By the 19th century it was flirting with extinction, lost to England and Scotland and reduced to a few pairs in the Tywi and Cothi Valleys of Wales.

Eventually, action was taken. Over one hundred years ago a community group formed its own protection programme, which went on to become the world's longest-running preservation campaign for any bird. The Welsh skies now support a healthy population of kites; hundreds of breeding pairs are thriving, supported by a burgeoning ecotourism scheme that provides dedicated bird hides and opportunities to join feeding sessions.

The town of Rhayader is the main focus for the kites; **Gigrin Farm** (☎ 01597-810243; www.gigrin.co.uk; adult/child £3/1; ⏲ feedings 3pm Easter-Oct, 2pm Nov-Easter) is the main feeding centre. Feeding also takes place at Nant yr Arian Forest Visitor Centre, east of Aberystwyth, and Llanddeusant Red Kite Feeding Station near Llandovery (both with the same times as Gigrin Farm). Sightings are virtually guaranteed at the following centres: the Elan Valley Visitor Centre, near Rhayader; Gilfach Farm, north of Rhayader; and the Ynyshir RSPB Reserve, near Machynlleth.

For more information contact the **Rhayader tourist office** (☎ 01597-810591).

The little spa resort made the *Guinness Book of Records* as Britain's smallest town (an archaic award it has tried desperately to retain) and has long been famous for crazy sporting events that are invariably fuelled by local grog (see the boxed text, opposite).

There are no sights to speak of, but Llanwrtyd's **tourist office** (☎ 610666; tic@celt.ruralwales.org; Ty Barcud, The Square; ⏲ 10am-4pm Mon & Wed, 10am-6pm Thu, 10am-8pm Fri & Sat) is open year-round to support the zany activities, and has a café with homemade cakes, local crafts and internet access (£1 per 20 minutes, £2.50 per hour).

With the Cambrian Mountains to the northwest and Mynydd Eppynt to the southeast, the town is in the heart of red kite country (see boxed text, above). Llanwrtyd is also a stop on the handsome Heart of Wales line (see the boxed text, p694).

Cyclists can rent bikes from **Cycles Irfon** (☎ 610668; Ffos Rd; per half-/full day £10/15). For mountain-biking options contact the **Red Kite Mountain Bike Centre** (☎ 610236) at the slightly shabby **Neuadd Arms** (☎ 610236; www.neuaddarmshotel.co.uk; The Square; s/d £32/55), the town hotel that is often the focus for the nutty events.

Fresh fish features heavily at **Drovers Rest** (☎ 610264; The Square; mains £14-16) – try salmon with chillies, honey and herbs – but you can also enjoy glazed pan-fried lamb or a simple afternoon tea in this Egon Ronay–recommended place that also has cottage-style bedrooms (singles/doubles £25/45). The hosts also arrange activities such as mountain biking, horse riding and fishing.

Stonecroft Hostel (☎ 610327; www.stonecroft.co.uk; Dol-y-coed Rd; 1- 6-bed r per person £16.50) is a decent independent place, affiliated with the **Stonecroft Inn** (☎ 610332; mains £2.80-6.50), which serves tasty, well-priced food, such as curry, fish and chips and jacket spuds.

LLANDRINDOD WELLS (LLANDRINDOD)

☎ 01597 / pop 5024

This Victorian spa town struck gold by touting its 'special' waters to the well-to-do gentry who rolled in for rest and recuperation. The grand architecture of the era remains, but today the town is mostly popular with geriatric holidaymakers.

You can still take a drink directly from the **chalybeate spring** ('chalybeate' refers to the iron salts) in historic Rock Park, or promenade around the slightly staid lake, a five-minute walk from the tourist office. Every August the townsfolk wind back the clock for the week-long **Victorian Festival**.

The **tourist office** (☎ 822600; www.visit-llandrindod.co.uk; Temple St; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) shares its home in an Art Nouveau motorcar showroom with the **National Cycle Exhibition** (☎ 825531; www.cyclemuseum.org.uk; adult/child £3/1; ⏲ 10am-4pm Easter-Oct, call for hrs Nov-Feb), which tells the fascinating story of push-bikes through the ages.

Llandrindod lies on the wonderful Heart of Wales line (see the boxed text, p694).

KNIGHTON (TREF-Y-CLAWDD)

☎ 01547 / pop 2743

Knighton (Tref-y-Clawdd) is a bubbly little town so close to England that the train station actually lies across the border. The main attraction for visitors is walking – Offa's Dyke Path passes by, and this is also the terminus of Glyndŵr's Way.

Near the town's central clock tower, the **tourist office** shares the same premises as the **Offa's Dyke Centre** (☎ 528753; oda@offasdyke.demon.co.uk; West St; ⏲ 9am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr).

Two miles southeast of town, the hilltop **Spaceguard Centre** (☎ 01547-520247; www.spaceguarduk.com; Llanshay Lane; adult/child £5/2.50), in the former Powys Observatory, is home to an asteroid and comet research centre. You can peer down the telescopes on a guided tour – who knows, you might make a unique discovery.

No, you haven't stepped back to the 1970s, **Fleece House** (☎ 520168; Market St; s/d £35/50; ☒) is just a little dated. Looks aren't everything though, and you can expect a friendly welcome and comfortable stay here.

Knighton lies on the scenic Heart of Wales line (see the boxed text, p694).

WELSHPOOL (Y TRALLWNG)

☎ 01938 / pop 5539

Another 'charming', 'bustling' valley town, but not really worth visiting unless you plan to see some of the outlying sights.

The **tourist office** (☎ 552043; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Easter) is by the Spar supermarket: head along Church St from the main traffic lights in the old town centre.

Sights

One mile south of town, **Powis Castle & Garden** (NT; ☎ 551929; castle & garden £9.60, garden only £6.60; ⏲ castle 1-4pm Thu-Mon Mar & Oct, 1-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Sep, garden 11am-6pm Thu-Mon Mar & Oct, Thu-Mon Apr-Sep) are world-famous for the steeply terraced garden of yew trees and rare plants. The red-sandstone fortress dates from 1200, but was furnished and adapted by generations of Herberts and Clives. The elaborate state bedroom has undergone recent restoration work and is

LLANWRTYD LUNACY

In the late 1970s a group of Llanwrtyd locals devised a plan to try to extend the tourist season. Several years (or beers?) later, what started as a wheeze turned in to a bulging calendar of silliness.

- **New Year Walk-In** (New Year's Eve) Village walk where participants light flaming torches, sing merry songs and ceremonially parade with an old horse's skull.
- **Saturnalia Beer Festival** (January) Roman-themed festival including traditional food such as *Lumbuli Assi Ita Ficent* (stuffed testicles) and a 'best-dressed slave' competition.
- **Man vs Horse Marathon** (May–June) Competition is surprisingly close in this gruelling 22-mile cross-country race. Runner Huw Lobb made history (and bagged £25,000) in 2004 by being the first non-equine winner, an accolade he still holds.
- **World Mountain Bike Bog Snorkelling Championships** (July) Donning wetsuits and snorkels, competitors cycle underwater through two lengths of a 55m trench dug in a nearby bog, surfacing twice to navigate. Richard Holmes was the 2006 winner, coming home in under a minute while dressed as James Bond.
- **World Bog Snorkelling Championships** (August Bank Holiday) As above but this time the swimmers take to the murky waters.
- **Real Ale Wobble & Ramble** (November) In conjunction with the Mid Wales Beer Festival, riders and walkers sup free ale at every checkpoint. To avoid the long arm of the law, none of the routes uses public roads.

Schedules are subject to revision, so confirm with the tourist office or **Green Events Ltd** (☎ 01591-610666; www.green-events.co.uk).

FINE FARMING FILLY

Every year in late July the cream of the Welsh farming community converges on Builth Wells for the **Royal Welsh Show** (www.rwas.co.uk), the country's premier agriculture and livestock festival. The four-day meeting sees an influx of wax jackets and rubber wellies as punters flock to see boastful bulls, handsome horses and pedigree porkers. Other attractions include the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery and lashings of the freshest, finest food.

If it all sounds a bit stuffy, think again. Unprecedented scandal erupted in 2006 when a local supplier threw a party celebrating a major contract, during which one female reveller performed a full striptease and impromptu pole dance before 150 open-mouthed spectators. So great was the shock that the Welsh Black Cattle Society called an extraordinary general meeting and one local news headline screamed 'Cattle Shed Naked Dance Inquiry', which conjured an altogether different but equally marvellous image.

From Llandrindod Wells take the scenic Heart of Wales railway line to Builth Road (10 minutes) or drive south on the A470.

now on public display. Indian treasures are on display in the integral **Clive Museum**.

The vintage **Welshpool & Llanfair Railway** (☎ 810441; www.wllr.org.uk; return trip £10.50; 🕑 most days Jun-Aug, most Sat & Sun Mar-Apr, Sep-Oct & Dec) opened for business in 1902, closed in 1956 and was reopened by enthusiasts in 1960. It chuffs for 8 charming miles to Llanfair Caereinion. Phone for detailed schedules.

Getting There & Away

Bus 75 comes from Shrewsbury (45 minutes, about every two hours Monday to Saturday), as does National Express coach 420 (£5, 35 minutes, daily) en route from London (£24.50, 5½ hours) via Birmingham (£7.80, 2¼ hours), continuing to Aberystwyth (£11.20, 1¾ hours).

Welshpool is on the Cambrian Main Line between Shrewsbury (20 minutes) and Aberystwyth (£8.70, 1½ hours), with services about every two hours (fewer on Sunday).

MACHYNLLETH

☎ 01654 / pop 2147

Machynlleth (ma-*hun*-khleth) is a peculiar mix of staunch Welsh heritage and far-out hippy living. The town is known as the 'ancient capital of Wales', as it is here that nationalist hero Owain Glyndŵr is thought to have established the country's first parliament in 1404. In the 21st century, however, you're more likely to trip over a tie-dyed druid or spiritual healer than a blood-curdling warrior.

That's because of the nearby Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), where greenies have spent more than 30 years creating methods for sustainable living. Do not leave the area without checking out their work (see the boxed text, opposite). In keeping with the unusual vibe, the town clock resembles an archaic, stone-built space rocket.

Machynlleth is also a good walking base, set amid hills near the head of the Dovey (Dyfi) Valley. To the north the mountain massif of Cader Idris (893m) looms large, located in the south of Snowdonia National Park (p733).

The **tourist office** (☎ 702401; mactic@powys.gov.uk; Maengwyn St; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) is next to the Owain Glyndŵr Parliament House. Across the road, internet is free at the **library** (☎ 702322; Maengwyn St).

Sights

The late-medieval slate **Owain Glyndŵr Parliament House** (☎ 702827; adult £1; 🕑 11am-3pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat, 10am-4pm Wed Easter-Sep), in the main street, actually post-dates Glyndŵr's original venue, but probably resembles it closely. The displays are rather listless given Glyndŵr's contribution to Welsh history.

A combined art gallery and converted chapel have developed into the **Museum of Modern Art for Wales** (MOMA; ☎ 703355; www.momawales.org.uk; Heol Penrallt; admission free; 🕑 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). The whitewashed art space displays permanent and changing exhibitions of Welsh work (some for sale), while the handsome, galleried **Tabernacle chapel** is now a 400-seat auditorium that boasts recording-standard acoustics. It is the scene of August's impressive week-long **Gŵyl Machynlleth Festival** of classical music.

Activities

With such close proximity to mountain and valley landscapes, this region provides both challenging **hikes** and gentle strolls. Cader Idris is the main mountain; the nearest (and strenuous) summit track starts from Minffordd, a 7-mile bus ride to the north. The tourist office can provide details of 15 kinder, shorter routes.

The area is also a centre for **mountain biking**. For route information and rentals, go to **Holey Trail** (☎ 700411; www.theholeytrail.com; per half-/full day £14/18) or outdoor specialists **Greenstiles** (☎ 703543; per half-/full day £12/16), both on Maengwyn St. For cycle touring, the cross-Wales Lôn Las Cymru (p651) route passes through town and over the striking Millennium Bridge across the River Dyfi en route to the CAT.

Sleeping

Corris Hostel (☎ 761686; www.canolfancorris.com; dm £13, incl breakfast £16) Sitting in the beautiful mountain village of Corris, 5 miles up the valley north of Machynlleth, this former schoolhouse in an ex-YHA hostel is now back in private hands. Accommodation is clean and the centre has won awards for its ecological philosophies.

Plas Llwyngwern (☎ 703970; Pantperthog; s without bathroom £20, d with/without bathroom £45/40; 🚭) Space is the thing you get most of at this sprawling old country house, popular with visitors to the CAT – it's just 250m away. Nestling amid leafy tranquillity, rooms here are jumbos, although only two have en suite. If the weather's fine, relaxing in the huge gardens is well recommended.

Maenllwyd (☎ 702928; Newtown Rd; s/d/t £35/55/70) If period charm is more your bag, this pastel-pink Victorian has bucket-loads. The eight rooms offer flexible accommodation, all with en suite and some atmospherically up in the rafters. There's a dedicated guest lounge, where you can tinkle on the piano, and substantial gardens.

Eryl House (☎ 703591; www.erylhouse.co.uk; Newtown Rd; s/d from £35/57) This modern place has crisp twin rooms and a breakfast room that wouldn't be out of place in a Scandinavian furniture shop. It's five minutes' walk east down the high street, away from the clock and tourist office.

For camping, **Gwerniago Farm** (☎ 791227; Pennal; 2-person tent sites £9) is a tent-only area, 3 miles west on the A493. **Llwyngwern Farm** (☎ 702492; Corris; 2-person tent sites £10) is convenient for the CAT.

Eating & Drinking

Quarry Wholefood Café (☎ 702624; Maengwyn St; dishes £2-6) Vegetarian and organic place run by the folks from the CAT, with a big emphasis on Fairtrade. It's not the hippest place but it sticks to what it knows, with good results.

Wynnstay Hotel (☎ 702941; Maengwyn St; mains £10; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Old coaching inn commended in the national press for top-notch dining in stylish surrounds. Try local game

GREEN IN THE HILLS

In achingly beautiful wooded valleys near Machynlleth, a small but dedicated band of people has spent 30 years practising sustainability at the thought-provoking **Centre for Alternative Technology** (CAT; ☎ 01654-705950; www.cat.org.uk; adult/child £8/4; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Easter–mid-Jul, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-6pm mid-Jul–Aug, 10am-dusk Oct-Easter).

If you've never thought of installing a composting toilet (straw-bale urinal, anyone?) or insulating your house with sheep's wool, you certainly will after a visit here. The CAT is a virtually self-sufficient cooperative where more than 50 exhibits demonstrate how wind, water and solar power provide food, heating and telecommunications.

The visit starts with a ride up the side of an old quarry in an ingenious water-balanced cable car. A drum beneath the top car fills with stored rainwater, and is then drawn down while the bottom car is hauled up. Other resourceful exhibits include a solar-powered telephone and large-scale community turbine. Kids love the interactive displays and adventure playground, and there's a great licensed organic-wholefood restaurant. The site had become a bit shabby – maybe too much hippy living? – but seems to be getting its act together again.

The CAT lies 3 miles north of Machynlleth on the A487 road to Dolgellau. Hourly buses (four on Sunday) run from the clock tower in Machynlleth; bus 34 stops directly at the visitor centre, while buses 32, X32 and 35 drop off in Pantperthog, 10 minutes' walk away. Arrive by bus or bike for a £1 discount.

(some shot by the landlord), fresh seafood, air-cured beef or a wood-fired pizza. Here's a challenge for fisherfolk: bring your catch and the Wynnstay will cook it for you. There are decent rooms (singles/doubles from £55/80) as well if you want to stay over.

Machynlleth is overrun with takeaways – **Dick's Diner** (☎ 703346; Maengwyn St; fish & chips £3.50) fries up decent fish and chips.

Getting There & Away

Machynlleth is on the Cambrian Main Line railway. Services run from Shrewsbury (£11.90, 1¼ hours, every two hours, five on Sunday) and Aberystwyth (30 minutes, every two hours, six on Sunday).

Bus X32 passes through Machynlleth. Northbound it serves Bangor (£5, 2¼ hours), Caernarfon (£5, 1¾ hours) and Dolgellau (30 minutes). Southbound it serves Aberystwyth (45 minutes). Services run about every two hours Monday to Friday (two on Sunday).

CEREDIGION

Up and down the coast of County Ceredigion, Wales' heart beats strong. This is a steadfastly nationalist area, with a spirit forged through the 11th-century Norman resistance. Here, far from the English border, Welsh remains the first language of three out of every five inhabitants.

Aberystwyth is the county capital, an old seaside town of traditional values fused with modern university verve. For steam buffs, it's also the place to ride one of the country's best railways.

Getting Around

In addition to the useful nationwide *Wales Bus, Rail and Tourist Map & Guide*, a public transport map and guide for Ceredigion is available from tourist offices or **Ceredigion County Council** (☎ 01970-633555). For further information, consult **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk).

The main-line railway service runs to Aberystwyth, via Welshpool and Machynlleth, from Shrewsbury (connecting at Machynlleth with the Cambrian Coaster for stations to Pwllheli).

Ceredigion is covered by the North & Mid WalesRover and Day Ranger value tickets (see p693).

ABERYSTWYTH

☎ 01970 / pop 15,935

A faded Georgian seaside resort might seem an improbable location for a large university, but Aberystwyth is lucky to have several thousand students who bring a much-needed contemporary touch to an otherwise drab town. Buzzing during term-time, the town has an alternative feel that pervades through the decent cafés and lively arts scene.

The town was founded by Edward I, whose 13th-century fortress was captured by Owain Glyndŵr in 1404 and finally destroyed by Oliver Cromwell in 1649. The castle remains are now atmospherically illuminated at night.

In 1864 the railways arrived and transformed Aberystwyth into a suddenly fashionable seaside destination. In 1872 it was chosen as the site of the first college of the University of Wales, and in 1907 the town became the home of the National Library of Wales.

The informative **tourist office** (☎ 612125; Terrace Rd; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm daily Jun–early Sep) shares a building with the county museum.

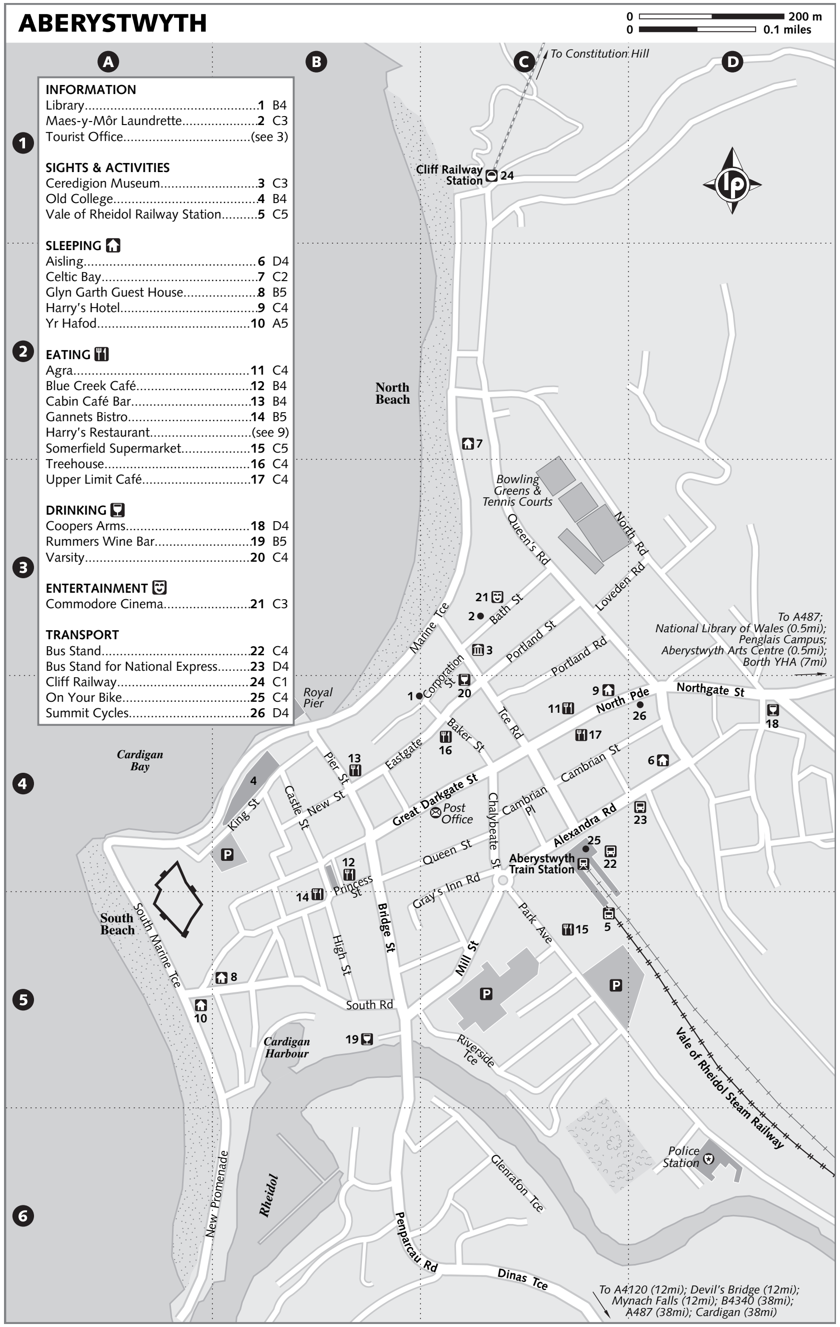
Free internet is available at the **library** (☎ 617464; Corporation St). **Maes-y-Môr Laundrette** (Bath St) is near the tourist office.

Sights

The best attraction in Aberystwyth is the one-hour ride on the restored **Vale of Rheidol Steam Railway** (☎ 625819; www.rheidolrailway.co.uk; adult/child return trip £12.50/3). This is one of the most attractive of Wales' restored railways, puffing 12 miles up the valley to Devil's Bridge (p713).

The line opened in 1902 to transport lead and timber, and the Great Western Railway engines date from 1923. The shortest full-line return trip is three hours; trains run at least twice daily (from next to the main-line station) from the end of May to the beginning of September, and fewer days at other times. Call for a full timetable.

A major Victorian attraction, the 100-year-old electric **Cliff Railway** (☎ 617642; www.aberystwythcliffrailway.co.uk; return trip £1.75; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-6.30pm Jul-Aug) grinds to the top of Constitution Hill (148m), with good views over the bay and north to Snowdonia. You can also experience the world's largest **camera obscura**, a simple optical instrument that projects images from the outside world onto a circular screen.


ABERYSTWYTH
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Maes-y-Môr Laundrette 2 C3
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To Constitution Hill
Cliff Railway Station
North Beach
Bowling Greens & Tennis Courts
Queen's Rd
North Rd
Loveden Rd
Marine Tce
Bath St
Portland St
Portland Rd
Corporation St
To A487; National Library of Wales (0.5mi); Penglais Campus; Aberystwyth Arts Centre (0.5mi); Borth YHA (7mi)
Royal Pier
Northgate St
North Pde
Tce Rd
Baker St
Eastgate
Pier St
Cardigan Bay
King St
Castle St
New St
Great Darkgate St
Post Office
Chalybeate St
Cambrian Pl
Cambrian St
Alexandra Rd
Queen St
Aberystwyth Train Station
Princess St
Gray's Inn Rd
Park Ave
South Beach
South Marine Tce
High St
Bridge St
Mill St
South Rd
Cardigan Harbour
Riverside Tce
Vale of Rheidol Steam Railway
Police Station
Glenrafon Tce
New Promenade
Rheidol
Penparcau Rd
Dinas Tce
To A4120 (12mi); Devil's Bridge (12mi); Mynach Falls (12mi); B4340 (38mi); A487 (38mi); Cardigan (38mi)
P

MYTHS & LEGENDS

Wales is awash with sagas inspired by medieval ancestry, bloody conflict and untamed landscapes. From generation to generation, elaborate tales of enchantment and wizardry have been bequeathed like rich family legacies.

As early as the 9th century tales of mystery and heroism were compiled in the *Historia Brittonum*. But the finest impressions come from the Mabinogion, a 14th-century tome containing occasionally terrifying tales of Celtic magic.

King Arthur is a recurrent character, especially in the Mabinogion. One of British legend's most romanticised heroes, he was believed to have been a 5th- or 6th-century cavalry leader who rallied British fighters against the marauding Saxon invaders. Time transformed Arthur in to a king of magic deeds, with wise magician Merlin by his side and a loyal band of followers in support. Arthur went on to slay Rita Gawr, a giant who butchered kings, in an epic battle on Mt Snowdon. Finally, Merlin delivered the dying hero to Avalon, which may well have been saintly Bardsey Island off the Llŷn Peninsula.

Watery images also feature strongly, most famously in the tale of Cardigan Bay. It is said that Seithenyn, keeper of the dykes that held the sea at bay, forgot to close the sluice gates after an evening's drinking. Water submerged 16 cities across the land, and to this day it is alleged you can hear the muffled peal of sunken church bells.

The world of Welsh myths is richly imaginative. For more see Robin Gwyndaf's detailed bilingual *Chwedlau Gwerin Cymru: Welsh Folk Tales*.

Occupying the former Coliseum theatre and cinema, the **Ceredigion Museum** (☎ 633088; Terrace Rd; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a sizable local-interest gallery, but in all honesty the exhibits of Aberystwyth's history are far from spellbinding.

Overlooking the town, the **National Library of Wales** (☎ 623800; www.llgc.org.uk; ⏲ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat) sits proudly on the hilltop and houses more than five million volumes, including some of Wales' most important literary treasures. The country's oldest text, the 12th-century *Black Book of Carmarthen*, is among its prized assets. The library also holds changing exhibitions of art and photography.

Opposite the shabby old pier on the seafront, the grand **Old College** was intended to be a hotel, but never received a single guest. Instead, the University of Wales was founded here in 1872.

Activities

For leisurely **cycling**, the quiet Rheidol Trail runs 11 miles from the seafront up the pretty Rheidol Valley – it's easy and low on cars. Ten miles east of Aberystwyth, dedicated **mountain-bike trails** crisscross the hills of Plynlimon at Nant yr Arian.

You can rent family and mountain bikes from **On Your Bike** (☎ 626532; Railway Station; per day £15).

Sleeping

Borth YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5708; borth@yha.org.uk; dm £12; ⏲ Easter-Oct by advance booking) You're just 20m from a large sandy beach at this old Edwardian house, 7 miles north of town.

Yr Hafod (☎ 617579; www.yrhafod.co.uk; 1 South Marine Tce; s/d without bathroom £24/50, d with bathroom £64) Minimal rooms, clean facilities, some great sea views, tidy guest lounge and full breakfast (veggie burger if you fancy) make this a good central option.

Aisling (☎ 626980; 21 Alexandra Rd; s/d without bathroom £26/48) It's business as usual at clean and cheerful Aisling, with flouncy decoration, friendly welcome and shared bathrooms.

Glyn Garth Guest House (☎ 615050; South Rd; s without bathroom from £26, d with bathroom from £58; ☒) Opposite Yr Hafod, this old, family-run place has slightly dated décor but a homely feel. Rooms are spotless and you can hear the sea lapping on the shore.

Celtic Bay (☎ 617788; 62 Marine Tce; s/d £30/50; ☒) Recently modernised, Celtic Bay makes a change from the faded guesthouses usually found in seaside towns. The Ritz it ain't, but it's a shade more up to date than most of its rivals (although none of the single rooms have en suite).

Harry's Hotel (☎ 612647; www.harrysaberystwyth.com; 40-46 North Pde; d from £65) Aberystwyth's smartest address. Rooms at Harry's are spacious and feature comfy beds, although light sleepers might find the street noise a distraction. The restaurant (see below) is recommended.

Eating

Agra (☎ 636999; 36 North Pde; dishes £2-8) Recommended Indian affair where you can enjoy a flavoursome curry while quaffing your own booze.

Blue Creek Café (St James Sq) Blue really is the colour here – the exterior is a fantastic rich hue. Inside, enjoy fine coffee and cake (try banana), or tasty veggie dishes. Sofas, games and magazines mean you might be here a while.

Cabin Café Bar (☎ 617398; Pier St) This Aberystwyth institution is a great place to sip coffee and watch the world go by from your woody little booth. Walls are adorned with black-and-white stills from the golden age of Hollywood – when the rain's coming down it's an atmospheric place to hang out.

Treehouse (☎ 615791; 14 Baker St; meals £4-7; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Take a coffee, chomp a cake, go African with chicken couscous, Thai with a veggie green curry or stay local with dressed crab salad. Whatever you choose, it's all fresh, all organic and all delicious. The shop downstairs stocks all manner of healthy produce to take away.

Harry's Restaurant (☎ 612647; www.harrysaberystwyth.com; 40-46 North Pde; mains £7.50-14.50; ⏲ Mon-Sat) At the hotel of the same name, this is a swanky but unpretentious option. From simple dishes such as open steak sandwiches to more contemporary offerings such as grilled salmon with asparagus and squid-ink pasta, the quality speaks volumes.

Upper Limit Café (☎ 07814 786863; 27 North Pde; mains £8.50-13.50) How many different dishes can you think of that incorporate bacon, sausage, beans and egg? Chances are the folks at Upper Limit, a traditional British caff, will have thought of a *lot* more.

Gannets Bistro (☎ 617164; 7 St James Sq; mains £8.50-13.50) It looks like a butcher's shop with its red-and-white stripy canopy, but gannets have been flocking to cosy Gannets for years (since 1981) to sample the fish and meat staples.

The Somerfield supermarket is beside the train station.

MONEY FOR NOTHING

On 19 June 2006 a group of lucky Aberystwythians hit the jackpot when a mysterious man shouted 'Who wants free money?' before launching a bundle of used notes into the air on Alexandra Rd. Passers-by scrabbled around trying to pocket the fluttering fortune, estimated at between £5,000 and £20,000.

The benefactor was subsequently arrested by police and given 'medical treatment' and, while some wallets were padded, a sizable amount of the cash was handed in amid a general bonhomie of trustworthiness and old-fashioned British honesty.

Drinking & Entertainment

Aberystwyth has more pubs and bars than most towns of this size, thanks mainly to the students. Try some of these:

Aberystwyth Arts Centre (☎ 623232; www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk; Penglais Rd) Based at the university, the town's main arts venue presents film, drama, dance and music programmes.

Commodore Cinema (☎ 612421; www.commodorecinema.co.uk; Bath St; admission £3.50) Check current films here.

Coopers Arms (☎ 624050; Northgate St) Popular Welsh venue with occasional live music.

Rummers Wine Bar (Bridge St) Near the sea. You can get DJs and live bands here.

Varsity (☎ 615234; Portland St) Big booze hall with little soul but plenty of punters.

Getting There & Away

The 420 National Express coach to London (£27, seven hours) runs daily. Other services include the X32 to Machynlleth (45 minutes, about two-hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday), Dolgellau (1¼ hours), Porthmadog (£5, 2¼ hours), Carmarthen ((£5, three hours) and Bangor ((£5, 3½ hours), and the X50 to Cardigan (1¼ hours, four Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday).

Aberystwyth is the terminus of the Cambrian Main Line. Trains run from Shrewsbury (£15.90, 1¾ hours, every two hours, five on Sunday). For connections with the Cambrian Coaster line (northwards to Snowdonia: Barmouth, Porthmadog and Pwllheli), change at Machynlleth.

AROUND ABERYSTWYTH

Devil's Bridge & Falls

For a good day trip, ride the Vale of Rheidol Steam Railway (p710) to the waterfalls at Devil's Bridge (Pontarfynach).

Below this hamlet, 12 miles inland, the Rivers Mynach and Rheidol tumble together off the Plynlimon (Pumlumon) Hills down a deep, wooded gorge. Just above the rivers' confluence the Rheidol drops 90m in a series of spectacular **waterfalls** viewed from a steep and narrow woodland path (adult £2.50). Spanning the Mynach, **Devil's Bridge** is itself a famous crossing point where three bridges are stacked above each other. The lowest was supposedly built by the Knights Templar before 1188, the middle one in 1753 and the uppermost road-bridge in recent times. The viewing platform (adult £1) is a 10-minute round trip on foot; wear sensible footwear.

Unfortunately there's no way to avoid the charge; if you don't cough up, you won't see a sausage.

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Northeast England

As far removed from London and the genteel pleasures of England's pastures green as you could imagine, the northeast has always been frontier country – passionate, independent and generally isolated from the rest of the island below. Its brooding beauty is in evidence throughout the epic countryside, from the windswept coastline lined with long empty beaches punctuated by lonely castles to the vast sweep of the interior, home to the heather-carpeted Cheviots and the awe-inspiring wilderness of Northumberland National Park, which stretches to the North Pennines. Beyond them is Scotland, the other actor in an 800-year-old historical drama of war, bloodshed and conquest: no wonder the folks up here have a reputation for being hardy.

It's been tough round these parts since prehistory, and it's taken an almost superhuman effort to leave a mark on this indomitable landscape. The Romans were especially successful; their legacy is the magnificent Hadrian's Wall, which served as their empire's northern frontier for nearly 300 years. The Normans weren't half bad either: they dotted the landscape with more castles and built one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world. Against their splendid backdrops, these marvellous constructions serve only to reinforce an impression of a landscape that hasn't changed all that much since it was part of the ancient kingdom of Northumbria.

If you look closely, however, you will see that the landscape is run through with dark, menacing scars: dotted throughout are the rusting hulks of an industry that drove this region for nearly 700 years. Mining is all but defunct now, yet the cities it built are still very much alive, none more so than Newcastle, one of the most dynamic urban centres in England.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gettin' doon in toon with a bottle of dog, aka taking on **Newcastle's wild nightlife** (p624)
- Walking like a Roman – hiking along the stunning **Hadrian's Wall** (p632)
- Castle-spotting along the blustery white-sand beaches of **Northumberland** (p637)
- Reliving Durham's industrial history during a fabulous day out at the **Beamish Open Air Museum** (p630)
- Going Norman in **Durham** (p627), whose cathedral is a spectacular World Heritage Site
- Hiking to the top of the Cheviot in **Northumberland National Park** (p641)

★ Northumberland
Northumberland NP ★
★ Hadrian's Wall
Newcastle-upon-Tyne ★
Durham ★

- POPULATION: 2.5 MILLION
- AREA: 3320 SQ MILES

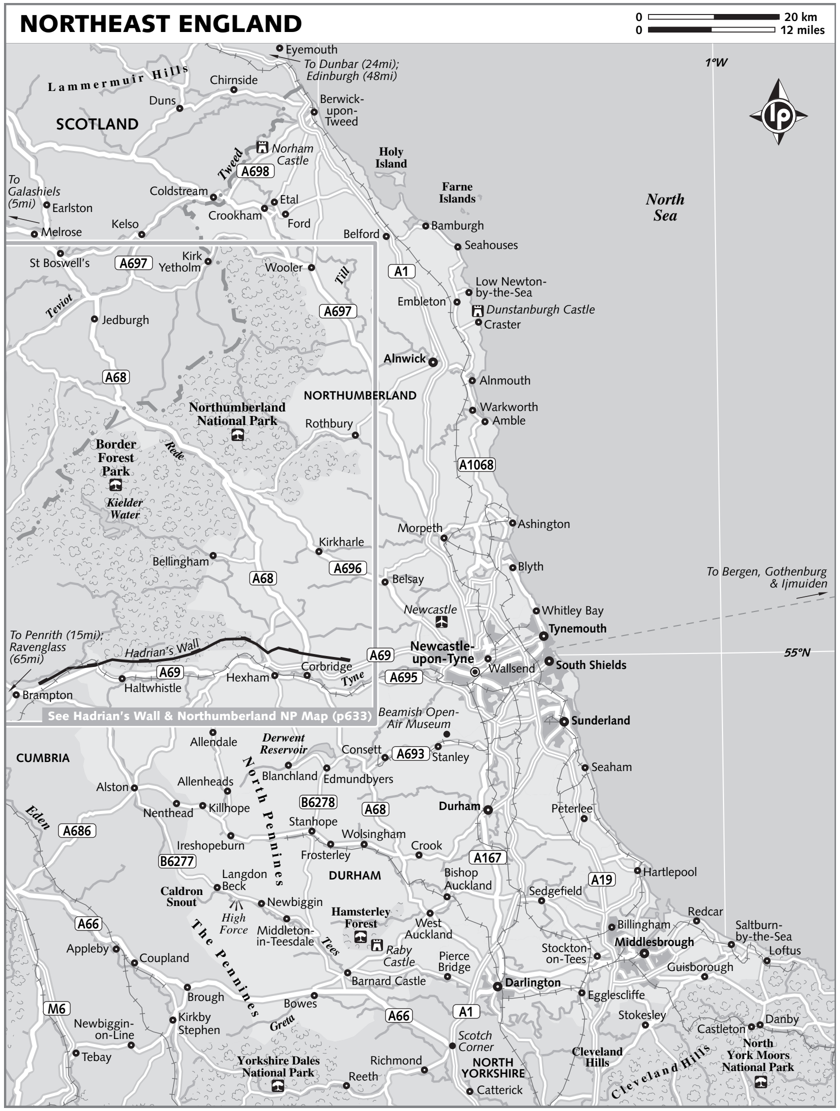
Orientation & Information

The Pennine hills are the dominant geological feature, forming a north–south spine that divides the region from Cumbria and Lancashire in the west and provides the source of major rivers such as the Tees and the Tyne.

The major transport routes are east of this spine, from Durham northwards to Newcastle and Edinburgh. Newcastle is an important ferry port for Scandinavia (see p625 for details). There's a northeast region website at www.thenortheast.com.

Activities

With the rugged moors of the Pennines and stunning seascape of the Northumberland



NORTHEAST ENGLAND
0 20 km
0 12 miles
1°W
55°N
Eyemouth
To Dunbar (24mi); Edinburgh (48mi)
Lammermuir Hills
Chirnside
Duns
SCOTLAND
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Holy Island
Norham Castle
Tweed
A698
Farne Islands
North Sea
To Galashiels (5mi)
Earlston
Coldstream
Etal
Crookham
Ford
Kelso
Melrose
Belford
Bamburgh
Seahouses
St Boswell's
A697
Kirk Yetholm
Wooler
Till
A1
Low Newton-by-the-Sea
Embleton
Dunstanburgh Castle
Craster
Teviot
Jedburgh
A697
Alnwick
A68
Alnmouth
NORTHUMBERLAND
Warkworth
Amble
Northumberland National Park
Rothbury
Border Forest Park
Rede
A1068
Kielder Water
Morpeth
Ashington
Kirkharle
Bellingham
A696
Blyth
A68
Belsay
To Bergen, Gothenburg & Ijmuiden
Newcastle
Whitley Bay
Tynemouth
To Penrith (15mi); Ravenglass (65mi)
Hadrian's Wall
A69
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Wallsend
South Shields
A69
Corbridge
Hexham
Tyne
A695
Haltwhistle
Brampton
See Hadrian's Wall & Northumberland NP Map (p633)
Beamish Open-Air Museum
Sunderland
Allendale
Derwent Reservoir
Consett
A693
Stanley
CUMBRIA
Blanchland
Edmundbyers
Seaham
Alston
Allenheads
North Pennines
Killhope
Nenthead
B6278
A68
Durham
Peterlee
Eden
A686
Stanhope
Wolsingham
Ireshopeburn
Frosterley
Crook
B6277
A167
Langdon Beck
DURHAM
Bishop Auckland
A19
Hartlepool
Caldron Snout
Newbiggin
Hamsterley Forest
Sedgefield
High Force
Middleton-in-Teesdale
West Auckland
Billingham
Redcar
Saltburn-by-the-Sea
A66
Middlesbrough
Loftus
Appleby
Coupland
Tees
Raby Castle
Stockton-on-Tees
Pierce Bridge
The Pennines
Barnard Castle
Darlington
Guisborough
Brough
Bowes
Eaglescliffe
M6
A66
A1
Stokesley
Danby
Kirkby Stephen
Greta
Castleton
Newbiggin-on-Line
Scotch Corner
Cleveland Hills
North York Moors National Park
Tebay
Yorkshire Dales National Park
Richmond
NORTH YORKSHIRE
Reeth
Catterick
Cleveland Hills

coast, there's some good walking and cycling in this region. If you're out in the open, be prepared for wind and rain at any time of year. But when the sun shines, you can't go wrong. More details on walking and cycling are given in the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83), and suggestions for shorter routes are given throughout this chapter. Regional tourism websites all contain walking and cycling information, and tourist information centres (TICs; referred to throughout this book simply as tourist offices) all stock leaflets (free) plus maps and guides (usually £1 to £5) covering walking, cycling and other activities.

CYCLING

There are some excellent cycling routes in this part of the world. A longtime favourite is the **Coast & Castles Cycle Route**, which runs south–north along the glorious Northumberland coast between Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Berwick-upon-Tweed, before swinging inland into Scotland to finish at Edinburgh. (This route is part of the National Cycle Network – see the boxed text, p88.) Of course you can also do it north–south, or just do the northeast England section. The coast is exposed, though, so check the weather and try to time your ride so that the wind is behind you.

The 140-mile **Sea to Sea Cycle Route** (C2C; www.c2c-guide.co.uk) runs across northern England from Whitehaven or Workington on the Cumbrian coast, through the northern part of the Lake District, and then over the wild hills of the North Pennines to finish at Newcastle-upon-Tyne or Sunderland. This popular route is fast becoming a classic, and most people go west to east to take advantage of prevailing winds. You'll need five days to complete the whole route; the northeast England section, from Penrith (in Cumbria) to the east coast, is a good three-day trip.

The other option is the brand-new **Hadrian's Cycleway** (www.cycleroutes.org.uk), a 172-mile route opened in July 2006 that runs from South Shields in Tyneside west along the wall and down to Ravenglass in Cumbria.

WALKING

The North Pennines are billed as 'England's last wilderness', and if you like to walk in quiet and fairly remote areas, these hills – along with the Cheviots further north – are among the best in England. Long routes through this area include the famous **Pennine Way**, which keeps mainly to the high ground as it crosses the region between the Yorkshire Dales and the Scottish border, but also goes through sections of river valley and some tedious patches of plantation. The whole route is over 250 miles, but the 70-mile section between Bowes and Hadrian's Wall would be a fine four-day taster. Elsewhere in the area, the great Roman ruin of **Hadrian's Wall** is an ideal focus for walking.

There's a huge range of easy loops taking in forts and other historical highlights. A very popular walk is the long-distance route from end to end, providing good options for anything from one to four days (see p633).

Getting There & Around

BUS

Bus transport around the region can be difficult, particularly around the more remote parts of Northumbria in the west. Call ☎ 0870 608 2 608 for information on connections, timetables and prices.

Several one-day Explorer tickets are available; always ask if one might be appropriate. The **Explorer North East** (adult/child £5.75/4.75), available on buses, covers from Berwick down to Scarborough, and allows unlimited travel for one day, as well as numerous admission discounts.

TRAIN

The main lines run north to Edinburgh via Durham, Newcastle and Berwick, and west to Carlisle roughly following Hadrian's Wall. Travelling to/from the south, it may be necessary to make connections at Leeds. Phone ☎ 0845 748 4950 for all train inquiries.

There are numerous Rover tickets for single-day travel and longer periods, so ask if one might be worthwhile. For example, the **North Country Rover** (adult/child £61.50/30.75) allows unlimited travel throughout the north (not including Northumberland) any four days out of eight.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

☎ 0191 / pop 189,870

Newcastle a hipster capital? It wouldn't have seemed at all possible a couple of decades ago when the city was orphaned by the demise of coal and coal-related industry. Newcastle stumbled around a bit before falling firmly into the arms of urban rejuvenation, which has seen it transformed into the superstylin' burg it is today, bursting with art galleries, restaurants and trendy bars.

Tell that to the tens of thousands of punters who roll into town on a Friday and stumble back out on a Sunday having partied to near-exhaustion in what is undoubtedly Britain's most powerful magnet for hen and stag nights. Because for all of its new-found sophistication, Newcastle is still about the wild and crazy nightlife, the alpha and omega of so many visits to the city.

If you do come, we hope you take a moment to cherish the city's greatest strength: the locals. Geordies are a fiercely independent bunch, tied together by history, adversity and that impenetrable dialect, the closest language to 1500-year-old Anglo-Saxon left in England. They are also proud, hard-working and indefatigably positive – perhaps their greatest quality considering how tough life has been.

ORIENTATION

The River Tyne marks the boundary between Newcastle to the north and Gateshead to the south; it is also one of the focal points for visitors to the city. Newcastle's attractive Victorian centre – which the local council has called Grainger Town to the uncertain shrugs of the locals – is only a short, uphill walk from the river. Between the river and the centre is Central Station (train). The coach station is on Gallowgate, while local and regional buses leave from Eldon Square and Haymarket bus stations. Jesmond is north of the city centre, and easily reached by bus or with the excellent Metro underground system.

The Tyne's southern bank – home to the impressive Baltic gallery and stunning Sage – is as far into Gateshead as you'll likely need to venture.

Maps

All tourist offices have handy, free tearaway maps of Newcastle and Gateshead. The Ordnance Survey's *Mini-Map* (£1.50) is a handy foldaway pocket map of Newcastle, but not Gateshead. The **Newcastle Map Centre** (☎ 261 5622; www.newtraveller.com; 1st fl, 55 Grey St) supplies copious maps and guides.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Blackwell's Bookshop (☎ 232 6421; 141 Percy St) A comprehensive range of titles.

Waterstone's (☎ 261 6140; 104 Grey St) There's another branch, also near Monument Metro, but this one is particularly finely housed.

Emergency

Police station (☎ 214 6555; cnr Pilgrim & Market Sts)

Internet Access

Internet Exchange (☎ 221 1746; Newcastle City Library, Princess Sq; per 30min £1; 🕐 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-3.45pm Sun)

Laundry

Clayton Road Laundrette (☎ 281 5055; 4 Clayton Rd, Jesmond)

Medical Services

Newcastle General Hospital (☎ 273 8811; Westgate Rd) Half a mile northwest of the centre, off Queen Victoria St.

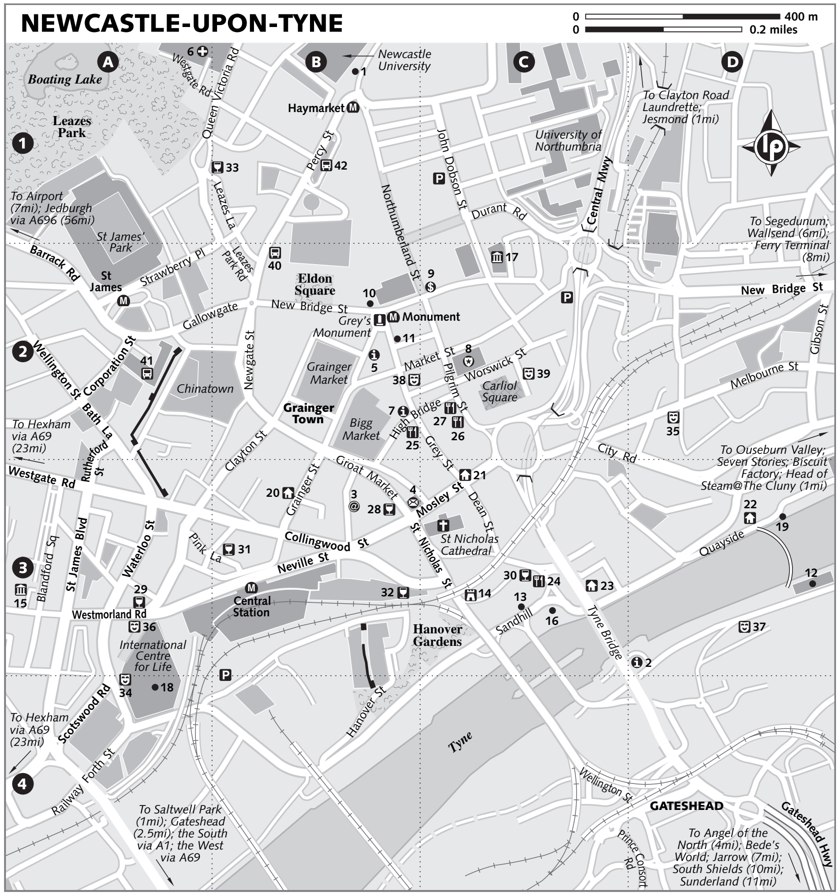
NEWCASTLE IN…

Two Days

Newcastle is all about Quayside, where you'll find the famous **Tyne bridges** (p621) and the remaining bits of 17th-century Newcastle, including **Bessie Surtee's House** (p621). A good walk is to cross the Millennium Bridge into Gateshead and check out **Baltic** (p622) and the **Sage** (p625). Wander back across the bridge and hop on a Quayside Q2 bus out to the Ouseburn Valley to visit the **Biscuit Factory** (p622) and (if you're with the kids) **Seven Stories** (p622).

Back in the elegant Victorian centre, visit the **Laing Art Gallery** (p621) and the **Life Science Centre** (p621). Stop off in **Blake's Coffee House** (p624) for a pick-me-up. Work your way up to the **Trent House Soul Bar** (p624) and find that song you love but haven't heard in years on the incredible jukebox. And just keep going; everyone else is, so why shouldn't you?

The next day, if your head can take it, take the bus south through Gateshead to the **Angel of the North statue** (p626). Unfortunately, there's not much else going on here, so you'll have to head back into town. Pick a bar, any bar, and do as they do round these parts. But remember: short sleeves only!


NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
Boating Lake
Leazes Park
Newcastle University
Haymarket
University of Northumbria
To Clayton Road Laundrette; Jesmond (1mi)
To Airport (7mi); Jedburgh via A696 (56mi)
St James' Park
Barrack Rd
St James
Strawberry Pl
Gallowgate
Eldon Square
New Bridge St
Grey's Monument
Monument
Chinatown
Grainger Market
Grainger Town
Bigg Market
Carliol Square
To Segedunum; Wallsend (6mi); Ferry Terminal (8mi)
New Bridge St
Melbourne St
Gibson St
City Rd
To Ouseburn Valley; Seven Stories; Biscuit Factory; Head of Steam@The Cluny (1mi)
To Hexham via A69 (23mi)
Westgate Rd
Rutherford St
Bath La
Wellington St
Corporation St
Clayton St
Newgate St
Percy St
Queen Victoria Rd
Leazes La
Leazes Park Rd
Northumberland St
John Dobson St
Durant Rd
Central Mwy
Market St
Pilgrim St
Worswick St
High Bridge
Grey St
Groat Market
Mosley St
Dean St
Grainger St
St Nicholas St
St Nicholas Cathedral
Collingwood St
Neville St
Pink La
Blandford Sq
St James Blvd
Waterloo St
Westmorland Rd
Central Station
International Centre for Life
Hanover Gardens
Hanover St
Sandhill
Tyne Bridge
Quayside
Tyne
Scotswood Rd
Railway
Forth St
To Hexham via A69 (23mi)
To Saltwell Park (1mi); Gateshead (2.5mi); the South via A1; the West via A69
Wellington St
GATESHEAD
Prince Consort Rd
Gateshead Hwy
To Angel of the North (4mi); Bede's World; Jarrow (7mi); South Shields (10mi); Sunderland (11mi)

INFORMATION		
Blackwell's Bookshop	1	B1
Gateshead Quays Visitor Centre	2	D3
Internet Exchange	3	B3
Main Post Office	4	B3
Main Tourist Office	5	B2
Newcastle General Hospital	6	A1
Newcastle Map Centre	7	B2
Police Station	8	C2
Thomas Cook	9	C2
Waterstone's	10	B2
Waterstone's	11	B2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art	12	D3
Bessie Surtee's House	13	C3
Castle Garth Keep	14	C3
Discovery Museum	15	A3
Guildhall	16	C3
International Centre for Life	(see 18)	
Laing Art Gallery & Blue Carpet	17	C2
Life Science Centre	18	A4
River Tyne Cruises	19	D3
SLEEPING		
Albatross Inn!	20	B3
Greystreethotel	21	C3
Malmaison	22	D3
Premier Lodge	23	C3
EATING		
Big Mussel	24	C3
Blake's Coffee House	25	B2
Paradiso Café Bar	26	C2
Secco Ristorante Salentino	27	C2
DRINKING		
Blackie Boy	28	B3
Camp David	29	A3
Crown Posada	30	C3
Forth	31	B3
Tokyo	32	B3
Trent House Soul Bar	33	B1
ENTERTAINMENT		
Digital	34	A4
Foundation	35	D2
Powerhouse Nightclub	36	A3
Sage Gateshead	37	D3
Theatre Royal	38	B2
World Headquarters	39	C2
TRANSPORT		
Eldon Square Bus Station	40	B2
Gallowgate Coach Station	41	A2
Haymarket Bus Station	42	B1

Money

Thomas Cook (☎ 219 8000; 6 Northumberland St) Has a bureau de change; it's just east of Monument.

Post

Main post office (35 Mosley St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) In the city centre.

Tourist Information

Gateshead Quays Visitor Centre (☎ 478 4222; St Mary's Church, Oakwellgate; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) Information on Gateshead's attractions.

Tourist office Airport (☎ 214 4422); Grainger St (☎ 277 8000; www.visitnewcastlegateshead.com; 132 Grainger St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 7.30pm Thu year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep); Guildhall (☎ 277 8000; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun). All provide a booking service (☎ 277 8042) as well as other assorted tourist sundries.

SIGHTS

Quayside

Newcastle's most recognisable attractions are the seven bridges that span the Tyne and some of the striking buildings that line it. Along Quayside, on the river's northern side, is a handsome boardwalk that makes for a pleasant stroll during the day but really comes to life at night, when the bars, clubs and restaurants that line it are full to bursting. A really great way of experiencing the river and its sights is by cruise (see p623).

TYNE BRIDGES

The most famous view in Newcastle is the cluster of Tyne bridges, and the most famous of these is the **Tyne Bridge** (1925–28), built at about the same time as (and very reminiscent of) Australia's Sydney Harbour Bridge. The quaint little **Swing Bridge** pivots in the middle to let ships through. Nearby, **High Level Bridge**, designed by Robert Stephenson, was the world's first road and railway bridge (1849). The most recent addition is the multiple-award-winning **Millennium Bridge** (aka Blinking Bridge; 2002), which opens like an eyelid to let ships pass.

OTHER SIGHTS

The Tyne's northern bank was the hub of commercial Newcastle in the 16th century. On Sandhill is **Bessie Surtee's House** (EH; ☎ 261 1585; 41-44 Sandhill; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), a combination of two 16th- and 17th-century merchant houses – all dark wood and sloping angles. Three rooms are open to the public. The daughter of a wealthy banker, feisty Bessie annoyed Daddy by falling in love with John Scott (1751–1838), a pauper. It all ended in smiles because John went on to become Lord Chancellor. Today it is run in conjunction with English Heritage (EH).

Just across the street is the rounded **Guildhall**, built in 1658. It now houses a branch of the tourist office.

City Centre

Newcastle's Victorian centre, a compact area bordered roughly by Grainger St to the west and Pilgrim St to the east, is supremely elegant and one of the most compelling examples of urban rejuvenation in England. At the heart of it is the supremely handsome Grey St, lined with fine classical buildings – undoubtedly one of the country's finest thoroughfares.

LIFE SCIENCE CENTRE

This excellent **science village** (☎ 243 8210; www.lifesciencecentre.org.uk; Scotswood Rd; adult/child £7.50/4.95; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun, last admission 4pm), part of the sober-minded International Centre for Life (a complex of institutes devoted to the study of genetic science), is one of the more interesting attractions in town. Through a series of hands-on exhibits and the latest technology you (or your kids) can discover the incredible secrets of life. The highlight is the Motion Ride, a motion simulator that, among other things, lets you 'feel' what it's like to score a goal at St James' Park and bungee jump from the Tyne Bridge. There's lots of thought-provoking arcade-style games, and if the information sometimes gets lost on the way, never mind, kids will love it.

LAING ART GALLERY

The exceptional collection at the **Laing** (☎ 232 7734; www.twmuseums.org.uk; New Bridge St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) includes works by Kitaj, Frank Auerbach, Henry Moore and a collection of paintings by John Martin (1789–1854), a Northumberland-born artist.

Outside the gallery is Thomas Heatherwick's famous **Blue Carpet** (2002) with shimmering blue tiles made from crushed glass and resin.

DISCOVERY MUSEUM

Newcastle's rich history is uncovered through a fascinating series of exhibits at this excellent

museum (☎ 232 6789; www.twmuseums.org.uk; Blandford Sq; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). The exhibits, spread across three floors of the former Co-operative Wholesale Society building, surround the mightily impressive 30m-long *Turbinia*, the fastest ship in the world in 1897. The different sections are all worth a look; our favourites were the self-explanatory Story of the Tyne and the interactive Science Maze.

CASTLE GARTH KEEP

The 'New Castle' that gave its name to the city has been largely swallowed up by the train station, leaving only the square Norman **keep** (adult/child £1.50/50p; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar) as one of the few remaining fragments. It has a fine chevron-covered chapel and great views across the Tyne bridges from its rooftop.

Ouseburn Valley

About a mile east of the city centre is the **Ouseburn Valley**, the 19th-century industrial heartland of Newcastle and now one of the city's hippest districts. Pubs, bars, restaurants and clubs now occupy the once-derelict Victorian mills and warehouses. To get there, jump onto the yellow Quayside Q2 bus that runs a loop through the valley from the city centre.

BISCUIT FACTORY

No prizes for guessing what this brand-new public **art gallery** (☎ 261 1103; www.thebiscuitfactory.com; Stoddart St; admission free; 🕑 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) used to be. What it is now, though, is the country's biggest art shop, where you can peruse and buy work by artists from near and far in a variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture, glassware and furniture. Prices are thoroughly democratic, ranging from £20 to £25,000, but even if you don't buy, the art is excellent and there's a top-class restaurant upstairs.

SEVEN STORIES – THE CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A marvellous conversion of a handsome Victorian mill has resulted in **Seven Stories** (☎ 0845 271 0777; www.sevenstories.org.uk; 30 Lime St; adult/child £5/4; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 6pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun), a very hands-on museum dedicated to the wondrous world of children's literature. Across the seven floors you'll find original manuscripts, a growing collection of artwork from the 1930s onwards and a constantly changing programme of exhibitions, activities and events designed to encourage the AA Milnes of the new millennium.

Gateshead

You probably didn't realise that that bit of Newcastle south of the Tyne is the 'town' of Gateshead, but local authorities are going to great lengths to put it right, even promoting the whole kit-and-caboodle-on-Tyne as 'NewcastleGateshead'. A bit clumsy, but we get the point. To date, the ambitious programme of development has seen the transformation of the southern banks of the Tyne, but there's as yet little to make you travel further afield than the water's edge.

BALTIC – THE CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Once a huge, dirty, yellow grain store overlooking the Tyne, **Baltic** (☎ 478 1810; www.balticmill.com; admission free; 🕑 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 8pm Wed) is now a huge, dirty, yellow art gallery to rival London's Tate Modern. Unlike the Tate, there are no permanent exhibitions here, but the constantly rotating shows feature the work and installations of some of contemporary art's biggest show stoppers. The complex has artists-in-residence, a performance space, a cinema, a bar, a spectacular rooftop restaurant (you'll need to book) and a ground-floor restaurant with riverside tables. There's also a viewing box for a fine Tyne vista.

NEWCASTLE FOR CHILDREN

Newcastle is friendly, full stop. Although at first glance the bonhomie mightn't seem to extend past buying rounds in the pub, on closer inspection there's plenty to keep the young 'uns entertained. The new and utterly wonderful Seven Stories (left) is the perfect destination for any kid who has an imagination, while closer to the centre the Life Science Centre (p621) and the Discovery Museum (p621) are brilliant and should keep the kids busy for the guts of a day.

QUIRKY NEWCASTLE

Take in the David Lynch vibe at Blackie Boy (p624), where it's not all it appears to be. Pop your coins into the world's best jukebox at the Trent House Soul Bar (p624) for the stomping sound of northern soul and pretend that James Blunt had stayed in the army. Buy some art at the Biscuit Factory (opposite) before checking out the gig list at the Head of Steam@The Cluny (p624). Cross one of the Tyne bridges (p621) on foot.

TOURS

There are a handful of tour options:

River Tyne Cruises (☎ 296 6740/1; www.tyneleisureline.co.uk; adult/child £12/7; 🕑 tours noon Sat & Sun May-early Sep) Three-hour river cruises departing from Quayside pier at Millennium Bridge, opposite Baltic.

Tom Keating Tours (☎ 488 5115; www.tomkeating.co.uk) Expert, tailor-made tours of the city by a well-respected blue-badge guide. Tours of surrounding region also available.

Walking Tours (adult/child £3/2; 🕑 2pm Wed & Sat Jun & Sep, Mon-Sat Jul-Aug) One-and-a-half-hour walking tours of the main sites of interest, run by and departing from the Grainger St branch of the tourist office.

SLEEPING

Although the number of city-centre options is on the increase, they are still generally restricted to the chain variety – either budget or business – that caters conveniently to the party people and business folk that make up the majority of Newcastle's overnight guests. Most of the other accommodations are in the handsome northern suburb of Jesmond, where the forces of gentrification and student power fight it out for territory. As the city is a major business destination, most places drop their prices for Friday and Saturday nights.

City Centre

With only one exception, the closer you get to the river, the more you'll pay.

Albatross Inn! (☎ 233 1330; www.albatrossnewcastle.com; 51 Grainger St; dm/d from £16.50/22.50; P 🖳 ♿) Finally, a hostel in the city centre! It's brand new, clean and fully equipped with decent-sized dorms, a self-catering kitchen, top-notch bathroom facilities, CCTV, electronic key cards, an internet station and even a small car park.

Premier Lodge (☎ 0870 990 6530; www.premierlodge.com; Quayside; r from £28) With a superb location in the old Exchange Building, this budget chain is right in the heart of the action. If you're here for the party, you shouldn't care that your room has about as much flavour as day-old chewing gum – if all goes according to plan, you won't be spending much time here anyway!

Malmaison (☎ 245 5000; www.malmaison.com; Quayside; d £119-140, ste £225-350; P) The affectedly stylish Malmaison touch has been applied to this former warehouse with considerable success, although it could pull the brake on the quasi-poetic publicity. Big beds, sleek lighting and designer furniture flesh out the Rooms of Many Pillows.

Greystreethotel (☎ 230 6777; www.greystreethotel.com; 2-12 Grey St; d/ste £135/175; P) A bit of designer class along the classiest street in the city centre has been long overdue: the rooms are gorgeous if a tad poky, all cluttered up with flat-screen TVs, big beds and handsome modern furnishings.

Jesmond

The bulk of Newcastle's budget and midrange accommodation is concentrated in the northeastern suburb of Jesmond, mainly on Osborne Rd. There are literally dozens of hotels and B&Bs along this street; here we recommend our favourites.

Catch the Metro to Jesmond or West Jesmond, or bus 80 from near Central Station, or bus 30, 30B, 31B or 36 from Westgate Rd.

Newcastle YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5972; www.yha.org.uk; 107 Jesmond Rd; dm from £13.95; 🕑 end Jan-end Dec) This nice, rambling place has small dorms that are generally full, so book in advance. It's close to the Jesmond Metro stop.

Adelphi Hotel (☎ 281 3109; 63 Fern Ave; s/d £39.50/60) Just off Osborne Rd, this attractive hotel has nice floral rooms that are clean and very neat – a rare thing around here for this price range.

Gresham Hotel (☎ 281 6325; www.gresham-hotel.com; 92 Osborne Rd; s/d from £50/70) Plenty of colours light up the rooms at this pleasant hotel attached to the trendy Bar Bacca; it's extremely popular with weekend visitors who swear by the attentive-but-informal service.

our pick **Jesmond Dene House** (☎ 212 3000; www.jesmonddenehouse.co.uk; Jesmond Dene Rd; s £115, d £145-195, ste £225-270; P) As elegant a hotel as you'll find anywhere, this exquisite property is the perfect marriage between traditional styles and modern luxury. The large, gorgeous bedrooms are furnished in a modern interpretation of the Arts & Crafts style and are bedecked with all manner of technological goodies (flat-screen digital TVs, digital radios, wi-fi) and wonderful bathrooms complete with underfloor heating.

EATING

The Geordie palate is pretty refined these days and there are a host of fine dining options in all price categories that make their mark. Conversely, if all you're looking for is stomach-lining crappy fast-food and dodgy ethnic cuisine, well there's plenty of that too.

City Centre

Blake's Coffee House (☎ 261 5463; 53 Grey St; breakfast £2-3.95, sandwiches £3; ⏲ 9am-6pm) There is nowhere better than this high-ceilinged café for a Sunday-morning cure on any day of the week. It's friendly, relaxed and serves up the biggest selection of coffees in town, from the gentle push of a Colombian blend to the toxic shove of Old Brown Java. We love it.

Big Mussel (☎ 232 1057; www.bigmussel.co.uk; 15 The Side; mains £6-12; ⏲ lunch & dinner) Mussels and other shellfish – all served with chips – are a very popular choice at this informal diner. There are pasta and vegetarian options as well, and students get 15% off everything. There's another branch (☎ 261 8927) on Leazes Park Rd, close to St James' Park, that does a roaring trade on match days.

Paradiso Café Bar (☎ 221 1240; 1 Market Lane; mains £8-12; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun) Hidden away in a small alley off Pilgrim St is one of the city's most popular spots. Good food, a mellow atmosphere and a fabulous little balcony for alfresco action keeps this place full almost all the time.

Secco Ristorante Salentino (☎ 230 0444; 86 Pilgrim St; mains £17-22; ⏲ lunch & dinner) Top-notch food from Salento in the Italian heel of Puglia makes this place an easy contender for best Italian restaurant in town. Some punters have been disappointed with the slowish service, which, for the price, should probably be a little snappier.

Jesmond

Pizzeria Francesca (☎ 281 6586; 134 Manor House Rd, Jesmond; mains £4-12; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This is how all Italian restaurants should be: chaotic, noisy, friendly, packed cheek-to-jowl and absolutely worth making the effort for. Excitable, happy waiters and huge portions of pizza and pasta keep them queuing at the door – get in line and wait because you can't book in advance.

DRINKING

Hey, guess what? Geordies love a good night out! Whether it's the scantily clad brash and brazen draining coloured cocktails in and around the bars of Bigg Market or the more sophisticated punter sipping the same in the hotspots along Quayside and Mosley St, there are few cities that pursue the art of the bevvy with the same untrammelled fervour. And if you're looking for a spit 'n' sawdust kind of place to enjoy a traditional ale, well there are plenty of those too.

We daren't even begin to list the pubs and bars in town, but here's a handful to start with. Get a bottle of dog and get doon.

Blackie Boy (11 Groat Market) At first glance, this darkened old boozer looks like any old traditional pub. Look closer. The overly red lighting. The single bookcase. The large leather armchair that is rarely occupied. The signage on the toilets: 'Dick' and 'Fanny'. This place could have featured in *Twin Peaks,* which is why it's so damn popular with everyone.

Crown Posada (31 The Side) An unspoilt, real-ale pub that is a favourite with more seasoned drinkers, be they the after-work or instead-of-work crowd.

Forth (Pink Lane) It's in the heart of the gay district, but this great old pub draws all kinds with its mix of music, chat and unpretentious atmosphere.

Tokyo (17 Westgate Rd) Tokyo has a suitably darkened atmosphere for what the cognoscenti consider the best cocktail bar in town; but we loved the upstairs garden bar where you can drink, smoke and chat with a view.

our pick **Trent House Soul Bar** (1-2 Leazes Lane) The wall has a simple message: 'Drink Beer. Be Sincere.' This simply unique place is the best bar in town because it is all about an ethos rather than a look. Totally relaxed and utterly devoid of pretentiousness, it is an old-school boozer that out-cools every other bar because it isn't trying to. And because it has the best jukebox in all of England – you could spend years listening to the extraordinary collection of songs it contains. It is run by the same folks behind the superb World Headquarters nightclub.

ENTERTAINMENT

Are you up for it? You'd better be, because Newcastle's nightlife doesn't mess about. There is nightlife beyond the club scene – you'll just have to wade through a sea of staggering, glassy-eyed clubbers to get to it. For current listings go online to www.thecrackmagazine.com. Club admissions range from £4 to £15.

Live Music

Head of Steam@The Cluny (☎ 230 4474; www.headofsteam.co.uk; 36 Lime St, Ouseburn Valley) This is one of the best spots in town to hear live music, attracting all kinds of performers, from experimental prog heads to up-and-coming pop goddesses. Touring acts and local talent fill the bill every night of the week. Take the Metro to Byker.

Sage Gateshead (☎ 443 4666; www.thesagegateshead.org; Gateshead Quays) Norman Foster's magnificent chrome-and-glass horizontal bottle is not just worth gaping at and wandering about in – it is also a superb venue to hear live music, from folk to classical orchestras. It is the home of the Northern Sinfonia and Folkworks.

Nightclubs

Digital (☎ 261 9755; www.yourfutureisdigital.com; Times Sq) The newest of Newcastle's megaclubs is this two-floored danceteria with one of the best sound systems we've ever heard. Our favourite night is Thursday's Stonelove (£4), a journey through 40 years of alternative rock and funk. Saturday's Shindig (£10 before 11pm, £12 after) is all about four to the floor.

Foundation (☎ 261 8985; www.foundation-club.com; 57-59 Melbourne St) This warehouse-style club features a massive sound system, fantastic lighting rig and regular guest slots for heavyweight DJs from all over. If you want a night of hard-core clubbing, this is the place for you.

World Headquarters (☎ 261 7007; www.trenthouse.com; Curtis Mayfield House, Carliol Sq) Dedicated to the genius of black music in all its guises – funk, rare groove, dance-floor jazz, northern soul, genuine R & B, lush disco, proper house and reggae – this fabulous club is strictly for true believers, and judging from the numbers, there are thousands of them.

Theatre

Theatre Royal (☎ 232 2061; www.theatre-royal-newcastle.co.uk; 100 Grey St) The winter home of the Royal Shakespeare Company is full of Victorian splendour and has an excellent programme of drama.

Sport

Newcastle United Football Club (☎ 201 8400; official www.nufc.co.uk, unofficial www.nufc.com; St James' Park, Strawberry Pl) It's more than just a football team: it is the collective expression of Geordie hope and pride as well as the release for decades of economic, social and sporting frustration. Its fabulous ground, St James' Park (☎ box office 261 1571) is always packed. Match tickets go on public sale about two weeks before a game or you can try the stadium on the day, but there's no chance for big matches, such as those against arch-rivals Sunderland.

GAY & LESBIAN NEWCASTLE

Newcastle's gay scene is pretty dynamic, with its hub at the 'Pink Triangle' formed by Waterloo, Neville and Collingwood Sts, but stretching as far south as Scotswood Rd. There are plenty of gay bars in the area and one outstanding nightclub.

Camp David (8-10 Westmorland Rd) An excellent mixed bar that is as trendy with straights as it is with the gay community.

Powerhouse Nightclub (☎ 261 4507; 9-19 Westmorland Rd) Newcastle's brashest queer nightclub, with flashing lights, video screens and lots of suggestive posing.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Newcastle International Airport (☎ 286 0966; www.newcastleairport.com) is 7 miles north of the city off the A696. It has direct services to Aberdeen, London, Cardiff, Dublin, Belfast, Oslo, Amsterdam, Paris, Prague, Brussels and a number of destinations in Spain.

Boat

DFDS Seaways (☎ 0870 533 3000; www.dfdsseaways.co.uk) operates ferries to Newcastle from Kristiansand in Norway, the Swedish port of Gothenburg and the Dutch port of Ijmuiden, near Amsterdam. For online ferry bookings, check out www.newcastleferry.co.uk.

Bus

National Express buses arrive and depart from the Gallowgate coach station. You can get to most anywhere, including London (£27.50, seven hours, six daily) and Manchester (£16.60, five hours, six daily). For Berwick-upon-Tweed (two hours, five daily) take bus 505, 515 or 525 from Haymarket bus station.

Local and regional buses leave from Haymarket or Eldon Square bus stations. For local buses around the northeast, don't forget the excellent-value Explorer North East ticket, valid on most services for £6.50.

Train

Newcastle is on the main rail line between London and Edinburgh. Services go to Alnmouth (for connections to Alnwick; £6.20, 20 minutes, four daily), Berwick (£15.30, 45 minutes, every two hours), Edinburgh (£39, 1½ hours, half-hourly), London King's Cross (£105.50, three hours, half-hourly) and York (£21.30, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes). There's also the scenic Tyne Valley Line west to Carlisle. See p634 for details.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport & Ferry Terminal

The airport is linked to town by the Metro (£3, 20 minutes, every 15 minutes).

Bus 327 links the ferry (at Tyne Commission Quay, 8.5 miles east), Central Station and Jesmond Rd. It leaves the train station 2½ hours and 1¼ hours before each sailing.

There's a taxi rank at the terminal; it costs about £15 to the city centre.

Car

Driving around Newcastle isn't fun thanks to the web of roads, bridges and one-way systems, but there are plenty of car parks.

Public Transport

There's a large bus network, but the best means of getting around is the excellent underground Metro, with fares from 55p. There are also several saver passes. The tourist office can supply you with route plans for the bus and Metro networks.

The **DaySaver** (£4.20, after 9am £3.40) gives unlimited Metro travel for one day, and the **DayRover** (adult/child £5/2.50) gives unlimited travel on all modes of transport in Tyne and Wear for one day.

Taxi

On weekend nights taxis can be rare; try **Noda Taxis** (☎ 222 1888), which has a kiosk outside the entrance to Central Station.

AROUND NEWCASTLE

ANGEL OF THE NORTH

The world's most frequently viewed work of art is this extraordinary 200-tonne, rust-coloured human frame with wings (aka the Gateshead Flasher) towering over the A1 (M) about 5 miles south of Newcastle – if you're driving, you just can't miss it. At 20m high and with a wingspan wider than a Boeing 767, Antony Gormley's most successful work is the country's largest sculpture. Buses 723 and 724 from Eldon Sq station, or 21, 21A and 21B from Pilgrim St, will take you there.

SEGEDUNUM

The last strong post of Hadrian's Wall was the fort of **Segedunum** (☎ 295 5757; www.twmuseums.org.uk; adult/child/concession £3.95/free/2.25; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep, 10am-3.30pm Nov-Mar), 4 miles east of Newcastle at Wallsend. Beneath the 35m tower, which you can climb for some terrific views, is an absorbing site that includes a reconstructed Roman bathhouse (with steaming pools and frescoes) and a fascinating museum that gives visitors a well-rounded picture of life during Roman times.

Take the Metro to Wallsend.

COUNTY DURHAM

Picturesque, peaceful villages and unspoilt market towns dot the lonely, rabbit-inhabited North Pennines and the gentle ochre hills of Teesdale. At the heart of it all is County Durham's simply exquisite capital, one of England's most visited towns and an absolute must on your northern itinerary.

Ironically, this pastoral image, so resonant of its rich medieval history, has only come back to life in recent years; for most of the last three centuries the county was given over almost entirely to the mining of coal, and the countryside is punctuated with the relics of that once all-important industry, now slowly being reclaimed by nature. Brutal and dangerous, coal mining was the lifeblood of entire communities; its sudden end in 1984 by stroke of a Conservative pen has left some purposeless towns and an evocatively scarred landscape.

Durham has had a turbulent history, though it pales in comparison with its troublesome northern neighbour. To keep the Scots and local Saxon tribes quiet, William the Conqueror created the title of prince bishop in 1081 and gave it vice-regal power over an area known as the Palatinate of Durham, which became almost a separate country. It raised its own armies, collected taxes and administered a separate legal system that – incredibly – wasn't fully incorporated into the greater English structure until 1971.

Getting Around

The Explorer North East ticket (see p618) is valid on many services in the county.

DURHAM

☎ 0191 / pop 42,940

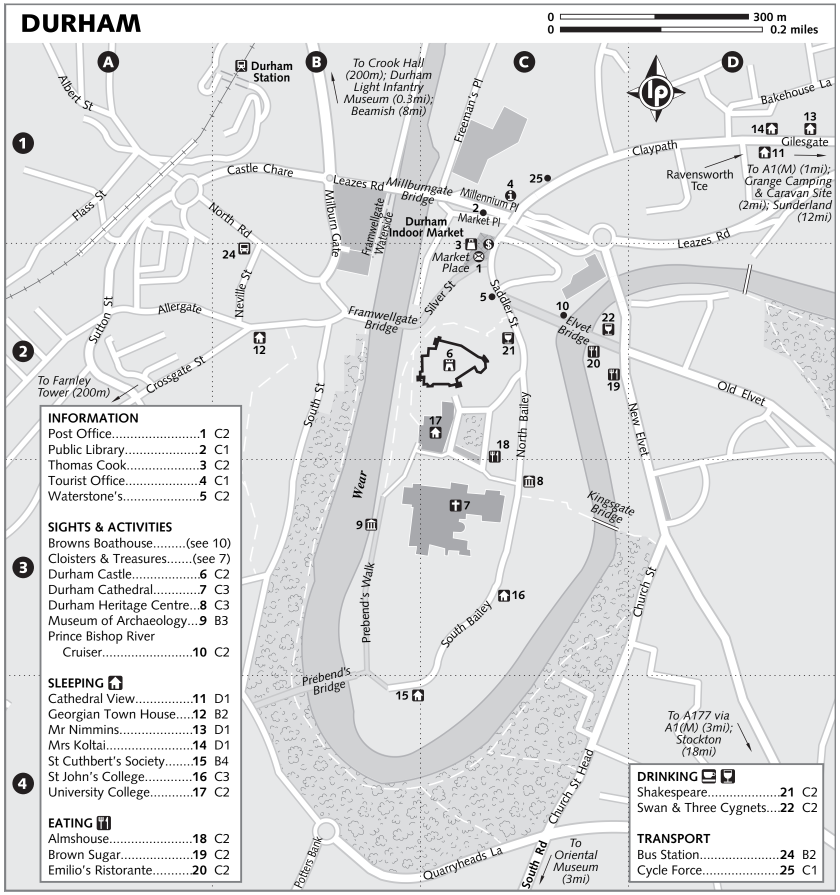
The best way to arrive in Durham is by early-morning train on a clear day. As you emerge from the train station, look across the River Wear to the hilltop peninsula, and you'll see the main reason for coming in all its resplendent glory. England's most beautiful Romanesque cathedral, a masterpiece of Norman architecture, rates pretty high on our brilliant Britain list. Consider the setting: a huge castle, the cathedral and, surrounding them both, a cobweb of cobbled streets usually full of upper-crust students attending Durham's other big pull, the university. It's all so...English.

OK, so the university may not have the hallowed prestige of Oxbridge – it was only founded in 1832 – but its terrific academic reputation and competitive rowing team make the disappointment of not getting into Oxford or Cambridge that bit easier to bear.

Once you've visited the cathedral, there's little else to do save walk the old town streets and find new spots from which to view Durham's main attraction. We recommend that you visit as a day trip from Newcastle unless you're planning some in-depth exploration of the surrounding county, in which case Durham is a tidy base.

Orientation

Market Pl, the tourist office, castle and cathedral are all on the peninsula surrounded by the River Wear. The train and bus stations


DURHAM
0 300 m
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A
B
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1
2
3
4
Durham Station
To Crook Hall (200m); Durham Light Infantry Museum (0.3mi); Beamish (8mi)
Albert St
Flass St
Castle Chare
Leazes Rd
Millburngate Bridge
Millennium Pl
Freeman's Pl
Market Pl
Durham Indoor Market
Market Place
North Rd
Milburn Gate
Framwellgate Waterside
Neville St
Allergate
Sutton St
Crossgate St
To Farnley Tower (200m)
Framwellgate Bridge
Silver St
Saddler St
Elvet Bridge
Old Elvet
New Elvet
Claypath
Bakehouse La
Gilesgate
Ravensworth Tce
To A1(M) (1mi); Grange Camping & Caravan Site (2mi); Sunderland (12mi)
Leazes Rd
South St
Wear
Prebend's Walk
North Bailey
South Bailey
Kingsgate Bridge
Prebend's Bridge
Church St
Church St Head
Potters Bank
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South Rd
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are to the west, on the other side of the river. Using the cathedral as your landmark, you can't really go wrong. The main sites are within easy walking distance of each other.

Information

Post office (Silver St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Public library (Millennium Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The only place in town to check email.
Thomas Cook (☎ 382 6600; 24-25 Market Pl) Near the tourist office.
Tourist office (☎ 384 3720; www.durhamtourism.co.uk; 2 Millennium Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) In the Gala complex, which includes a theatre and cinema.
Waterstone's (☎ 383 1488; 69 Saddler St) A good selection of books.

Sights

DURHAM CATHEDRAL

Durham's most famous building – and the main reason for visiting unless someone you know is at university here – has earned superlative praise for so long that to add more would be redundant; how can you do better than the 19th-century novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote fawningly: 'I never saw so lovely a magnificent a scene, nor (being content with this) do I care to see better.' Let's not go nuts here. No building is *that* beautiful, but the definitive structure of the Anglo-Norman Romanesque style is still pretty amazing. We would definitely put it in our top-church-in-England list – as do many others, including Unesco, who declared it a World Heritage Site in 1986.

The **cathedral** (☎ 386 4266; www.durhamcathedral.co.uk; donation requested; 🕒 9.30am-8pm mid-Jun–Aug, 9.30am-6.15pm Mon-Sat & 12.30-5pm Sun Sep–mid-Jun, private prayer & services only 7.30-9.30am Mon-Sat, 7.45am-12.30pm Sun year-round) is enormous and has a pretty fortified look; this is due to the fact that although it may have been built to pay tribute to God and to house the holy bones of St Cuthbert, it also needed to withstand any potential attack by the pesky Scots and Northumberland tribes who weren't too thrilled by the arrival of the Normans a few years before. Times have changed, but the cathedral remains an overwhelming presence, and modern-day visitors will hardly fail to be impressed by its visual impact.

The interior is genuinely spectacular. The superb nave is dominated by massive, powerful piers – every second one round, with an equal height and circumference of 6.6m, and carved with geometric designs. Durham was the first European cathedral to be roofed with stone-ribbed vaulting, which upheld the heavy stone roof and made it possible to build pointed transverse arches – the first in England, and a great architectural achievement. The central tower dates from 1262, but was damaged in a fire caused by lightning in 1429, and was unsatisfactorily patched up until it was entirely rebuilt in 1470. The western towers were added in 1217–26.

Built in 1175 and renovated 300 years later, the **Galilee Chapel** is one of the most beautiful parts. The northern side's **paintings** are rare surviving examples of 12th-century wall painting and are thought to feature St Cuthbert and St Oswald. The chapel also contains the **Venerable Bede's tomb**. Bede was an 8th-century Northumbrian monk, a great historian and polymath whose work *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is still the prime source of information on the development of early Christian Britain. Among other things, he introduced the numbering of years from the birth of Jesus.

The **Bishop's Throne**, built over the tomb of Bishop Thomas Hatfield, dates from the mid-14th century. Hatfield's effigy is the only one to have survived another turbulent time: the Reformation. The **high altar** is separated from **St Cuthbert's tomb** by the beautiful stone **Neville Screen**, made around 1372–80. Until the Reformation, the screen included 107 statues of saints.

The cathedral has worthwhile **guided tours** (adult/child/student £3.50/free/2.50; 🕒 10.30am, 11.30am & 2.30pm Mon & Sat). Evensong is at 5.15pm from Tuesday to Saturday (Evening Prayer on Monday) and at 3.30pm on Sunday.

There's a splendid view from the top of the **tower** (adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat mid-Apr–Sep, to 3pm Oct-Mar), but you've got to climb 325 steps to enjoy it.

Cloisters & Treasures

The monastic buildings are centred on the cloisters, which were heavily rebuilt in 1828. The west door to the cloisters is famous for its 12th-century ironwork. On the western side is the **Monks' Dormitory** (adult/child £1/30p; 🕒 10am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, plus 12.30-3.15pm Sun Apr-Sep), now a library of 30,000 books and displaying Anglo-Saxon carved stones, with a vaulted undercroft that houses the Treasures and a restaurant. There is also an **audiovisual display** (adult/child £1/30p; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Apr-Nov) on the building of the cathedral and the life of St Cuthbert.

The **Treasures** (adult/child £2.50/70p; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun) refer to the relics of St Cuthbert, but besides his cross and coffin, there's very little here related to the saint. The collection is made up mostly of religious paraphernalia from later centuries.

DURHAM CASTLE

Built as a standard motte-and-bailey fort in 1072, **Durham Castle** (☎ 374 3800; www.durhamcastle.com; adult/concession £5/3.50; 🕒 tours only, on the hour 10am-noon & 2-4pm Jun-Oct, 2-4pm Mon, Wed, Sat & Sun Nov-May) was the prince bishops' home until 1837, when it became the first college of the new university. It remains a university hall, and you can stay here (see p630). The castle has been much altered over the centuries, as each successive prince bishop sought to put his particular imprimatur on the place, but heavy restoration and reconstruction were necessary anyway as the castle is built of soft stone on soft ground. Highlights of the 45-minute tour include the groaning 17th-century Black Staircase, the 16th-century chapel and the beautifully preserved Norman chapel (1080).

OTHER SIGHTS

Near the cathedral, in what was the St Mary le Bow Church, is the **Durham Heritage Centre** (☎ 386 8719; St Mary le Bow, North Bailey; admission £1.50; 🕒 2pm-4.30pm Jun, 11am-4.30pm Jul-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Apr, May & Oct), with a pretty crowded collection of displays on Durham's history from the Middle Ages to mining. It's all suitably grim, especially the reconstructed prison cells.

Crook Hall (☎ 384 8028; www.crookhallgardens.co.uk; Sidegate; adult/child £4.50/4; 🕒 1-5pm Fri-Mon Easter, Sun May & Sep, Sun-Fri Jun-Aug) is a medieval hall with 1.6 hectares of charming small gardens, about 200m north of the city centre.

Activities

BOATING

The **Prince Bishop River Cruiser** (☎ 386 9525; Elvet Bridge; adult £4.50; 🕒 2pm & 3pm Jun-Sep) offers one-hour cruises.

You can hire a rowing boat from **Browns Boathouse** (☎ 386 3779; per hr per person £3), below Elvet Bridge.

WALKING

There are superb views back to the cathedral and castle from the riverbanks; walk around the bend between Elvet and Framwellgate Bridges, or hire a boat at Elvet Bridge.

Guided walks (adult/child £3/free; 🕒 2pm Wed, Sat & Sun May-Sep) of 1½ hours leave from Millennium Pl – contact the tourist office for details. **Ghost walks** (☎ 386 1500; adult/child £3/1; 🕒 6.30pm Mon Jun-Sep, 8.30pm Jul & Aug) lasting 1½ hours also drift around town.

Sleeping

It's all about a cathedral view round these parts. But when you consider that it's visible from pretty much everywhere, it's quality, not quantity, that counts. The tourist office makes local bookings free of charge, which is a good thing considering that Durham is always busy with visitors: graduation week in late June results in accommodation gridlock.

Farnley Tower (☎ 375 0011; www.farnley-tower.co.uk; The Avenue; s/d from £55/75; 🅿 🚭) A beautiful Victorian stone building that looks more like a small manor house than a family-run B&B, this place has 13 large rooms, none better than the superior rooms, which are not just spacious but have excellent views of the cathedral and castle. The service is impeccable.

Cathedral View (☎ 386 9566; www.cathedralview.com; 212 Gilesgate; s/d from £60/75) This plain-fronted Georgian house has no sign, but inside it does exactly what it says on the tin. Six large rooms decorated with lots of cushions, and coordinated bed linen and window dressings make up the numbers, but it's the three at the back that are worth the fuss: the views of the cathedral are superb. A small breakfast terrace with the same splendid vista is an added touch of real class.

Georgian Town House (☎/fax 386 8070; 10-11 Crossgate St; s/d from £60/80) This listed building in the middle of town has large, airy rooms decorated in the true spirit of Laura Ashley: elaborate stencilling, plenty of pillows and fancy window dressings. It's close to the cathedral, so the rooms facing it have great views. There's also a small garden with flowers and a rockery.

A couple of small, similarly priced B&Bs on Gilesgate may not offer much in the way of décor, size or cathedral view, but are worth a try if you're stuck:
Mr Nimmins (☎ 384 6485; www.nimmins.co.uk; 14 Gilesgate; s/d £24/44)
Mrs Koltai (☎ 386 2026; 10 Gilesgate; s/d £25/42)

Eating

Cheap eats aren't a problem in Durham thanks to the students, but quality is a little

UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

Several colleges rent their rooms during the holidays (Easter and July to September). The rooms are generally modern and comfortable, like most contemporary student halls. Phone ☎ 374 7360 or click on www.dur.ac.uk/conferences/tourism for more information.

St John's College (☎ 334 3877; 3 South Bailey; s/d without bathroom £25.50/48) This college is right next to the cathedral; none of the rooms come with en suite.

St Cuthbert's Society (☎ 374 3364; 12 South Bailey; s/d £24/45) A few doors down from St John's, with similar student-style rooms.

University College (☎ 374 3863; s/d with bathroom £36/66, without bathroom £25/45) Smack on the Palace Green, this has the best location. Some rooms are available year-round, such as the bishop's suite (per person £85), decked out with 17th-century tapestries.

thin on the ground. Some pubs do good bar food; see Drinking (below).

Almshouse (☎ 386 1054; Palace Green; dishes £4-7; 🕒 9am-5pm) Fancy imaginative and satisfying snacks (how about spicy beef with red-bean casserole and rice?) served in a genuine 17th-century house right on Palace Green? It's a shame about the interior, though, which has been restored to look like any old museum café.

Brown Sugar (☎ 454 2242; New Elvet; dishes £5-7.50; 🕒 7.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10.30pm Sun) This trendy coffee shop–cum-bar is a favourite with university students, who fold into the oversize leather couches, nibble on a ciabatta sandwich (no ordinary bread here, mate) and talk about how much study they should be doing. A perfect hang-out.

Emilio's Ristorante (☎ 384 0096; 96 Elvet Bridge; pizza or pasta from £6.95; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) Durham's top spot for pizza, pasta and other Italian staples has a wonderful location overlooking the Wear. Try the *malfatti al forno,* a kind of oven-baked ravioli filled with ricotta cheese and spinach.

Drinking

Durham may have a big student population, but most students seem to take the whole study thing really seriously, because the nightlife here isn't as boisterous as you might expect from a university town. There is, however, a fistful of lovely old bars. The tourist office has a bimonthly *What's On* guide.

Shakespeare (63 Saddler St) As authentic a traditional bar as you're likely to find in these parts, this is the perfect local's boozer, complete with nicotine-stained walls, cosy snugs and a small corner TV to show the racing. Needless to say, the selection of beers and spirits is terrific. Not surprisingly, students love it too.

Swan & Three Cygnets (☎ 384 0242; Elvet Bridge) This high-ceilinged riverside pub with courtyard tables overlooks the river. It also serves some pretty good bar food (mains around £8.50) – usually fancy versions of standard bar fare such as bangers and mash.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is west of the river on North Rd. All National Express buses arrive here, while bus 352 links Newcastle and Blackpool via Durham, Barnard Castle, Raby Castle and Kirkby Stephen. Destinations include Edinburgh (£21.50, four hours, one daily), Leeds (£13.80, 2½ hours, four daily) and London (£27.50, 6½ hours, four daily). There are three daily National Express buses to Newcastle (£2.50, 30 minutes); bus 21 provides a half-hourly service but takes twice as long because it makes plenty of stops along the way.

TRAIN

There are services at least hourly to London (£105.50, three hours), Newcastle (£4.60 single, 20 minutes) and York (£20.60, one hour).

Getting Around

Pratt's Taxis (☎ 386 0700) charges a minimum of £2.40. **Cycle Force** (☎ 384 0319; 29 Claypath) charges £10/17 per half-/full day for mountain-bike hire.

AROUND DURHAM

Beamish Open-Air Museum

County Durham's greatest attraction is **Beamish** (☎ 0191-370 4000; www.beamish.org.uk; admission Nov-Mar £6, Apr-Oct adult/child £16/10; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar, last entry 3pm year-round), a living, breathing, working museum that offers a fabulous, warts-and-all portrait of industrial life in the northeast during the 19th and 20th centuries. Instructive and lots of fun to boot, this huge museum spread over 121 hectares will appeal to all ages.

You can go underground, explore mine heads, a working farm, a school, a dentist and a pub, and marvel at how every cramped pit cottage seemed to find room for a piano. Don't miss a ride behind an 1815 Steam Elephant locomotive or a replica of Stephenson's Locomotion No 1.

Allow at least three hours to do the place justice. Many elements (such as the railway) aren't open in the winter – call for details.

Beamish is about 8 miles northwest of Durham; it's signposted from the A1 (M) – take the A693 west at junction 63. Buses 709 from Newcastle (50 minutes, hourly) and 720 from Durham (30 minutes, hourly) run to the museum.

BARNARD CASTLE

☎ 01833 / pop 6720

Barnard Castle, or just plain Barney, is anything but: a thoroughly charming market town packed with atmospheric pubs and antique shops, with a daunting ruined castle at its edge and an extraordinary French chateau on its outskirts. If you can drag yourself away, it is also a terrific base for exploring Teesdale and the North Pennines.

Staff at the **tourist office** (☎ 690909; tourism@teesdale.gov.uk; Woodleigh, Flatts Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) handle visitor inquiries.

Sights

THE CASTLE

Once one of northern England's largest castles, **Barnard Castle** (EH; ☎ 638212; www.english-heritage.org.uk; admission £3.40; 🕒 10am-6pm Easter-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Thu-Mon only Nov-Mar) was partly dismantled during the 16th century, but its huge bulk, on a cliff above the Tees, still manages to cover more than two very impressive hectares. Founded by Guy de Bailleul and rebuilt around 1150, its occupants spent their time suppressing the locals and fighting off the Scots – on their days off they sat around enjoying the wonderful views of the river.

BOWES MUSEUM

The 19th-century industrialist and art fanatic John Bowes didn't do things by halves, so when he commissioned French architect Jules Pellechet to build a new museum to show off his terrific collection, the result was this extraordinary, Louvre-inspired French chateau 1.5 miles west of town. Opened in 1892, the **Bowes Museum** (☎ 690606; www.bowesmuseum.org.uk; adult/child £7/free; 🕒 11am-5pm) could give the Victoria & Albert Museum a run for its money, with lavish furniture and paintings by Canaletto, El Greco and Goya. The museum's most beloved exhibit, however, is the marvellous mechanical silver swan, operated at 12.30pm and 3.30pm.

Sleeping & Eating

Marwood House (☎ 637493; www.kilgarriff.demon.co.uk; 98 Galgate; s/d £27/48) A handsome Victorian property with tastefully appointed rooms (the owner's tapestries feature in the décor and her homemade biscuits sit on a tray), Marwood House's standout feature is the small fitness room in the basement, complete with a sauna that fits up to four people.

Greta House (☎ 631193; www.gretahouse.co.uk; 89 Galgate; s/d £28.50/55) This lovely Victorian home stands out for the little touches that show that extra bit of class – fluffy bathrobes, face cloths and posh toiletries. What really did it for us though was the stay-in service: a tray of lovely homemade sandwiches and a superb cheeseboard to nibble at from the comfort of bed.

Old Well Inn (☎ 690130; www.oldwellinn.co.uk; 21 The Bank; s/d from £34.50/79) You won't find larger bedrooms in town than at this old coaching inn, which makes it an excellent option for families – it even takes pets. It has a reputation for excellent, filling pub grub, although the service is somewhat lacklustre at times.

Getting There & Away

Bus 352 runs daily between Newcastle and Blackpool via Durham, Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, Raby Castle and Kirkby Stephen.

AROUND BARNARD CASTLE

The ransacked, spectral ruins of **Egglestone Abbey** (🕒 dawn-dusk), dating from the 1190s, overlook a lovely bend of the Tees. You can envisage the abbey's one-time grandeur despite the gaunt remains. They're a pleasant mile-long walk south of Barnard Castle.

About 7 miles northeast of town is the sprawling, romantic **Raby Castle** (☎ 660202; www.rabycastle.com; admission £7; 🕒 castle 1-5pm, grounds 11am-5.30pm Sun-Fri Jun-Aug, Wed & Sun May & Sep), a stronghold of the Catholic Neville family until it engaged in some ill-judged plotting (the 'Rising of the North') against the oh-so Protestant Queen Elizabeth in 1569. Most of the interior dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, but the exterior remains true to the original design, built around a courtyard and surrounded by a moat. There are beautiful formal gardens and a deer park. Buses 8 and 352 zip between Barnard Castle and Raby (20 minutes, eight daily).

NORTH PENNINES

The North Pennines stretch from western Durham to just short of Hadrian's Wall in the north. In the south is Teesdale, the gently undulating valley of the River Tees; to the north is the much wilder Weardale, carved through by the River Wear. Both dales are marked by ancient quarries and mines – industries that date back to Roman times. The wilds of the North Pennines are also home to the picturesque Derwent and Allen Valleys, north of Weardale.

For online info, check out www.northpennines.org.uk.

HADRIAN'S WALL

Britain's most famous Roman construction is proof that when it came down to the big jobs, the Romans weren't shirkers. Besides their other accomplishments, they threw up this bloody great big wall between AD 122 and 128 to keep 'us' (Romans, subdued Anglo-Saxons) in and 'them' (hairy barbarians from Scotland) out. Or so the story goes.

The truth, however, is a little more prosaic. Emperor Hadrian didn't order the wall built because he was afraid of northern invasion. The truth is no part of the wall was impenetrable – a concentrated attack at any single point would have surely breached it – but was meant to mark the border as though to say that the Roman Empire would extend no further. By drawing a physical boundary, the Romans were also tightening their grip on the population to the south – for the first time in history, passports were issued to citizens of the empire, marking them out not just as citizens but, more importantly, as taxpayers.

Irrespective of the whys and wherefores, the wall was a mighty impressive bit of engineering, a spectacular 73-mile testament to ambition and the practical Roman mind stretching across the narrow neck of the island from Solway Firth in the west almost to the mouth of the Tyne in the east. Even today, almost 2000 years after the first stone was laid, the sections that are still standing remain an awe-inspiring sight, proof that when the Romans wanted something done, they just knuckled down and did it.

The section from Newcastle to the River Irthing was built of stone, and turf blocks were used on the section to Solway – roughly 3m thick and 4.5m high. A 3m-deep, 9m-wide ditch and mound were excavated immediately in front (except where there were natural defences). Every Roman mile (1.62 miles; even in measurement the Romans outdid us) there was a gateway guarded by a small fort (milecastle) and between each milecastle were two observation turrets. Milecastles are numbered right across the country, starting with Milecastle 0 at Wallsend and ending with Milecastle 80 at Bowness-on-Solway. Between each was a series of turrets, tagged alphabetically, so Milecastle 39 was followed by Turret 39B, Turret 37B and then Milecastle 40.

A series of forts were developed as bases some distance south (and may predate the wall), and 16 actually lie astride it. The prime remaining forts on the wall are Cilurnum (Chesters), Vercovicium (Housesteads) and Banna (Birdoswald). The best forts behind the wall are Corstopitum, at Corbridge, and Vindolanda, north of Bardon Mill.

Orientation

Now a World Heritage Site, Hadrian's Wall crosses beautiful, varied landscape. Starting in the lowlands of the Solway coast, it crosses the lush hills east of Carlisle to the bleak, windy ridge of basalt rock known as Whin Sill overlooking Northumberland National Park, and ends in the urban sprawl of Newcastle. The most spectacular section lies between Brampton and Corbridge.

Carlisle, in the west, and Newcastle, in the east, are good starting points, but Brampton, Haltwhistle, Hexham and Corbridge all make good bases.

The B6318 follows the course of the wall from the outskirts of Newcastle to Birdoswald; from Birdoswald to Carlisle it pays to have a detailed map. The main A69 road and the railway line follow 3 or 4 miles to the south. This section follows the wall from east to west.

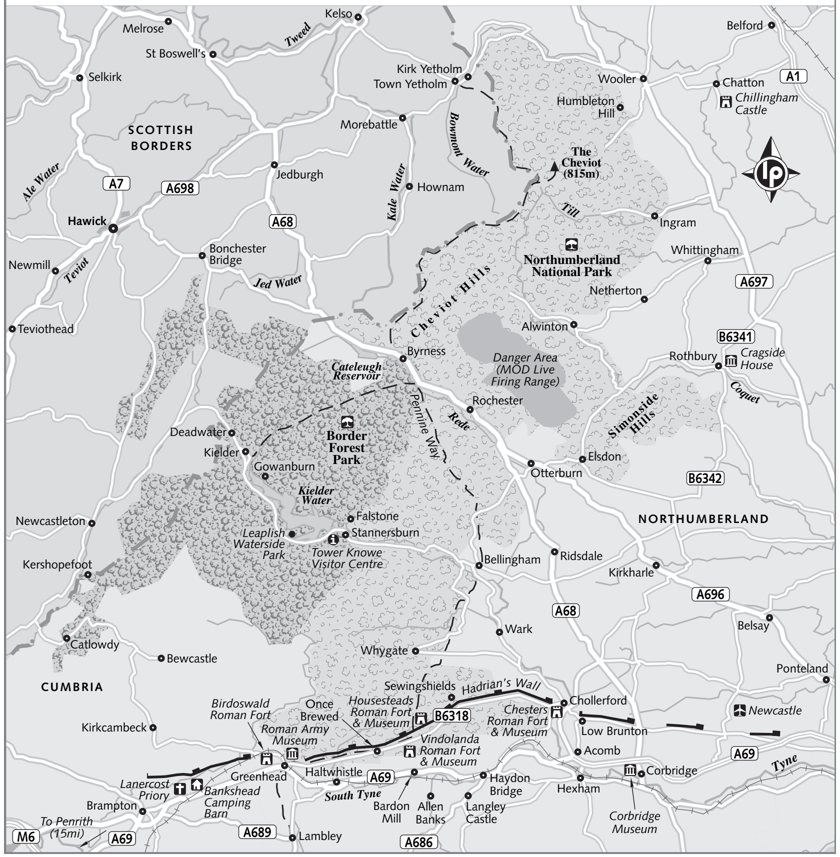
Information

Carlisle and Newcastle tourist offices are good places to start gathering information, but there are also tourist offices in Hexham, Haltwhistle, Corbridge and Brampton. The **Northumberland National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01434-344396; Once Brewed; 🕒 10am-5pm mid-Mar–May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Aug) is off the B6318. There's a **Hadrian's Wall information line** (☎ 01434-322002; www.hadrians-wall.org) too. May sees a spring festival, with lots of re-creations of Roman life along the wall (contact tourist offices for details).

Walking & Cycling

The newish **Hadrian's Wall Path** is an 84-mile National Trail that runs the length of the wall from Wallsend in the east to Bowness-on-Solway in the west. The entire route should take about seven days on foot, giving plenty of time to explore the rich archaeological heritage along the way. Anthony Burton's *Hadrian's Wall Path – National Trail Guide* (Aurum Press; £12.99), available at most bookshops and tourist offices in the region, is good for history, archaeology and the like, while the *Essential Guide to Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail* (Countryside Agency; £3.95) is a top guide to everyday facilities and services along the walk.

If you're planning to cycle along the wall, tourist offices sell the *Hadrian's Wall Country Cycle Map* (£3); you'll be cycling along part of Hadrian's Cycleway (see p618).


HADRIAN'S WALL & NORTHUMBERLAND NP
0 10 km
0 6 miles
Kelso
Melrose
Tweed
St Boswell's
Belford
Selkirk
Kirk Yetholm
Town Yetholm
Wooler
Chatton
A1
Chillingham Castle
Humbleton Hill
Morebattle
SCOTTISH BORDERS
Bowmont Water
The Cheviot (815m)
Ale Water
Jedburgh
Kale Water
Hownam
A7
A698
Hawick
A68
Till
Ingram
Teviot
Bonchester Bridge
Newmill
Northumberland National Park
Whittingham
Jed Water
Cheviot Hills
Netherton
A697
Teviothead
Alwinton
B6341
Byrness
Rothbury
Cragside House
Cateleugh Reservoir
Danger Area (MOD Live Firing Range)
Coquet
Rochester
Pennine Way
Rede
Simonside Hills
Deadwater
Border Forest Park
Kielder
Elsdon
Gowanburn
Otterburn
B6342
Kielder Water
Falstone
Newcastleton
NORTHUMBERLAND
Leaplish Waterside Park
Stannersburn
Tower Knowe Visitor Centre
Kershopefoot
Bellingham
Ridsdale
Kirkharle
A696
A68
Wark
Belsay
Catlowdy
Bewcastle
Whygate
Ponteland
CUMBRIA
Sewingshields
Hadrian's Wall
Chollerford
Birdoswald Roman Fort
Once Brewed
Housesteads Roman Fort & Museum
Chesters Roman Fort & Museum
Newcastle
B6318
Kirkcambeck
Roman Army Museum
Low Brunton
Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum
Acomb
A69
Greenhead
Haltwhistle
A69
Haydon Bridge
Corbridge
Tyne
Lanercost Priory
Bankshead Camping Barn
South Tyne
Hexham
Brampton
Bardon Mill
Allen Banks
Langley Castle
Corbridge Museum
To Penrith (15mi)
M6
A69
A689
Lambley
A686

Getting There & Around

BUS

The AD 122 Hadrian's Wall Bus (get it? three hours, six daily June to September) is a hail-and-ride, guided service that runs between Hexham (the 9.15am service starts in Wallsend) and Bowness-on-Solway. Bus 185 covers the route the rest of the year (Monday to Saturday only).

West of Hexham the wall runs parallel to the A69, which connects Carlisle and Newcastle. Bus 685 runs along the A69 hourly, passing near the youth hostels and 2 to 3 miles south of the main sites throughout the year.

The **Hadrian's Wall Rover** (adult/child 1-day £6.50/4.50, 3-day £13/9) is available from the driver or the tourist offices, where you can also get timetables.

TRAIN

The railway line between Newcastle and Carlisle (Tyne Valley Line) has stations at Corbridge, Hexham, Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill, Haltwhistle and Brampton. This service runs daily, but not all trains stop at all stations.

CORBRIDGE

☎ 01434 / pop 2800

The mellow commuter town of Corbridge is a handsome spot above a green-banked curve in the Tyne, its shady, cobbled streets lined with old-fashioned shops. Folks have lived here since Saxon times when there was a substantial monastery, while many of the buildings feature stones nicked from nearby Corstopitum.

The **tourist office** (☎ 632815; www.thisiscorbridge.co.uk; Hill St; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun mid-May–Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter–mid-May & Oct) is part of the library.

Corbridge Roman Site & Museum

What's left of the Roman garrison town of **Corstopitum** (EH; ☎ 632349; admission incl museum £3.80; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Mar) lies about a half a mile west of Market Pl on Dere St, once the main road from York to Scotland. It is the oldest fortified site in the area, predating the wall itself by some 40 years, when it was used by troops launching retaliation raids into Scotland. Most of what you see here, though, dates from around AD 200, when the fort had developed into a civilian settlement and was the main base along the wall.

Sleeping & Eating

Riverside Guesthouse (☎ 632942; www.theriversideguesthouse.co.uk; Main St; s/d from £42/62, without bathroom from £32/50; Ⓟ) An excellent guesthouse in the middle of town, Riverside has large, comfortable rooms and unfussy, friendly service. It's especially popular with walkers.

Errington Arms (☎ 672250; Stagshaw, B6318 off A68 roundabout; mains £8-13; 🕒 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) About 3 miles north of town is this marvellous 18th-century stone pub where delicious food is served up in suitably atmospheric surroundings. From the mouth-watering ploughman's lunch to more intricate delicacies such as loin of lamb with mushroom and chive risotto, it won't disappoint; you can wash it all down with a pint of real ale.

Valley Restaurant (☎ 633434; www.valleyrestaurants.co.uk; Station Rd; mains £9-14; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) This fine Indian restaurant in a lovely building above the station supplies a unique service as well as delicious food. A group of 10 or more diners from Newcastle can catch the 'Passage to India' train to Corbridge accompanied by a waiter, who will supply snacks and phone ahead to have the meal ready when the train arrives!

Getting There & Away

Bus 685 between Newcastle and Carlisle comes through Corbridge, as does the half-hourly bus 602 from Newcastle to Hexham, where you can connect with the Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122. Corbridge is also on the Newcastle–Carlisle railway line.

HEXHAM

☎ 01434 / pop 10,690

Long famed for its fine Augustinian abbey, handsome Hexham was awarded Country Life's Best Market Town award for 2005, a fitting tribute to this bustling town interlinked with cobbled alleyways. It is the most substantial of the wall towns, with more restaurants, hotels and high-street shops than anywhere between Newcastle and Carlisle. The **tourist office** (☎ 652220; www.hadrianswallcountry.org; Wentworth Car Park; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun mid-May–Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct–mid-May) is northeast of the town centre.

Sights

Stately **Hexham Abbey** (☎ 602031; 🕒 9.30am-7pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr) is a marvellous example of Early English architecture. Inside, look out for the Saxon crypt, the only surviving element of St Wilfrid's Church, built with inscribed stones from Corstopitum in 674.

The **Old Gaol** (☎ 652349; adult/child £3.50/2; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, Mon, Tue & Sat Oct–mid-Nov), completed in 1333 as England's first purpose-built prison, was recently revamped and all four floors can be visited in all their gruesome glory. The history of the Border Reivers – a group of clans who fought, kidnapped, blackmailed and killed each other in an effort to exercise control over a lawless tract of land along the Anglo–Scottish border throughout the 16th century – is also retold, along with tales of the punishments handed out in the prison.

Sleeping & Eating

Acomb YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5664; www.yha.org.uk; Main St; dm £9.50; 🕒 Easter-Oct) Simple accommodation – basic bunks and functional bathrooms – is on offer in this converted stable on the edge of Acomb village, 2.5 miles north of Hexham and 2 miles south of the wall. Hexham can be reached by bus (745 and 880, frequently) or train.

West Close House (☎ 603307; Hextol Tce; s/d from £22/48; Ⓟ ☒) This immaculate 1920s house, in a leafy cul-de-sac off Allendale Rd (the B6305) and surrounded by a beautiful garden, is highly recommended for its friendliness and comfort.

Dipton Mill (☎ 606577; Dipton Mill Rd; mains around £6-10) For sheer atmosphere, you can't beat this superb country pub 2 miles out on the road to Blanchland, among woodland and by a river. It offers sought-after ploughman's lunches and real ale, not to mention a terrific selection of whiskies.

There are several bakeries on Fore St and, if you turn left into the quaintly named Priestpopple near the bus station, you'll find a selection of restaurants.

Getting There & Away

Bus 685 between Newcastle and Carlisle comes through Hexham hourly. The AD 122 and the winter-service bus 185 connect with other towns along the wall, and the town is on the Newcastle–Carlisle railway line (hourly).

CHESTERS ROMAN FORT & MUSEUM

The best-preserved remains of a Roman cavalry fort in England are at **Chesters** (EH; ☎ 01434-681379; admission £3.80; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar), set among idyllic green woods and meadows and originally constructed to house a unit of troops from Asturias in northern Spain. They include part of a bridge (beautifully constructed and best appreciated from the eastern bank) across the River North Tyne, four well-preserved gatehouses, an extraordinary bathhouse and an underfloor heating system. The museum has a large collection of Roman sculpture. Take bus 880 or 882 from Hexham; it is also on the route of Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122.

HALTWHISTLE

☎ 01434 / pop 3810

It's one of the more important debates in contemporary Britain: where exactly is the centre of the country? The residents of Haltwhistle, basically one long street just north of the A69, claim that they're the ones. But then so do the folks in Dunsop Bridge, 71 miles to the south. Will we ever know the truth? In the meantime, Haltwhistle is the spot to get some cash and load up on gear and groceries. Thursday is market day.

The **tourist office** (☎ 322002; 🕒 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun May-Sep, 9.30am-noon & 1-3.30pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat Oct-Apr) is in the train station.

Ashcroft (☎ 320213; www.ashcroftguesthouse.co.uk; Lanty's Lonnen; s/d from £34/68) is a marvellous Edwardian home surrounded by beautifully manicured, layered lawns and gardens from which there are stunning views (also enjoyed from the breakfast room). The owners like their flowers so much they decorated most of the house accordingly. Highly recommended.

Bus 685 comes from Newcastle (1½ hours) and Carlisle (45 minutes) 12 times daily. Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122 (June to September) or 185 (October to May) connects Haltwhistle with other places along the wall. Bus 681 heads south to Alston (55 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday). The town is also on the Newcastle–Carlisle railway line (hourly).

AROUND HALTWHISTLE

Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum

The extensive site of **Vindolanda** (☎ 01434-344277; www.vindolanda.com; admission £4.95, with Roman Army Museum £7.50; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Feb, Mar, Oct & Nov) offers a fascinating glimpse into the daily life of a Roman garrison town. The time-capsule museum displays leather sandals, signature Roman toothbrush-flourish helmet decorations, and countless writing tablets such as a student's marked work ('sloppy'), and a parent's note with a present of socks and underpants (things haven't changed – in this climate you can never have too many).

The museum is just one part of this large, extensively excavated site, which includes impressive parts of the fort and town (excavations continue) and reconstructed turrets and temple.

It's 1.5 miles north of Bardon Mill between the A69 and B6318 and a mile from Once Brewed.

Housesteads Roman Fort & Museum

The wall's most dramatic site – and the best-preserved Roman fort in the whole country – is at **Housesteads** (EH; ☎ 01434-344363; admission £3.80; 🕙 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). From here, high on a ridge and covering 2 hectares, you can survey the moors of Northumberland National Park, and the snaking wall, with a sense of awe at the landscape and the aura of the Roman lookouts.

The substantial foundations bring fort life alive. The remains include an impressive hospital, granaries with a carefully worked-out ventilation system and barrack blocks. Most memorable are the spectacularly situated communal flushable latrines, which summon up Romans at their most mundane.

Housesteads is 2.5 miles north of Bardon Mill on the B6318, and about 3 miles from Once Brewed. It's popular, so try to visit outside summer weekends, or late in the day when the site will be quiet and indescribably eerie.

Other Sights

One mile northwest of Greenhead near Walltown Crags, the kid-pleasing **Roman Army Museum** (☎ 016977-47485; www.vindolanda.com; admission £3.95, with Vindolanda £7.50; 🕙 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Feb-Mar & Oct-Nov) provides lots of colourful background detail to wall life, such as how far soldiers had to march per day and whether they could marry.

Ok, so *technically* it's in Cumbria (we won't tell if you don't), but the remains of the once-formidable **Birdoswald Roman Fort** (EH; ☎ 016977-47602; admission £3.80; 🕙 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct), on an escarpment overlooking the beautiful Irthing Gorge, were part of the wall and so merit inclusion in this chapter on logical grounds. They're on a minor road off the B6318, about 3 miles west of Greenhead; a fine stretch of wall extends from here to Harrow Scar Milecastle. About half a mile away, across the impressive river footbridge, is another good bit of wall, ending in two turrets and the meticulous structure of the **Willowford Bridge abutment**.

Still in Cumbria, about 3 miles further west along the A69, are the peaceful raspberry-coloured ruins of **Lanercost Priory** (EH; ☎ 016977-3030; admission £2.70; 🕙 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Thu-Mon Oct), founded in 1166 by Augustinian canons. Ransacked several times, after the dissolution it became a private house, and a priory church was created from the Early English nave. The church contains some beautiful Pre-Raphaelite stained glass. The AD 122 bus can drop you at the gate.

Sleeping

Holmhead Guest House (☎ 016977-47402; www.bandbhadrianswall.com; Thirlwall Castle Farm, Greenhead; dm/s/d £10/43/66) Four fairly compact rooms are available in this lovely remote old cottage; most of the space is taken up by the big beds. All the rooms have a shower rather than a bath. A barn was recently converted into a large dorm room, perfect for budget walkers and cyclists. It's about half a mile north of Greenhead.

Greenhead YHA Hostel (☎ 016977-47401; www.yha.org.uk; dm £11.95; 🕙 Jul & Aug, call to check other times) A converted Methodist chapel by a trickling stream and a pleasant garden, 3 miles west of Haltwhistle. The hostel is served by bus AD 122 or bus 685.

Once Brewed YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5980; www.yha.org.uk; Military Rd, Bardon Mill; dm £13.95; 🕙 year-round) This modern and well-equipped hostel is central for visiting both Housesteads Fort, 3 miles away, and Vindolanda, 1 mile away. Bus 685 (from Hexham or Haltwhistle train stations) will drop you at Henshaw, 2 miles south, or you could leave the train at Bardon Mill 2.5 miles southeast. The Hadrian's Wall bus drops you at the door June to September.

Birdoswald YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6124; www.yha.org.uk; dm £15.50; 🕙 Easter-Oct, call to check other times) This farmhouse within the grounds of the Birdoswald complex has recently been converted into a hostel with basic facilities, including a self-service kitchen and laundry. The price includes a visit to the fort.

NORTHUMBERLAND

England's last frontier has much more in common with the wilds of Scotland to the north than the genteel landscapes to the south. Utterly wild and stunningly beautiful, with ne'er a trace of man save the fortified houses and friendly villages that speckle the rugged interior, Northumberland natural riches are immense, from the long, stunning beaches bookmarked by dramatic wind-worn castles to the east through the national park that protects much of the region right down to Hadrian's Wall, the most strikingly evocative part of which slices through the south.

Getting Around

The excellent *Northumberland Public Transport Guide* (£1.60) is available from local tourist offices. Transport options are good, with a train line running along the coast from Newcastle to Berwick and on to Edinburgh.

ALNWICK

☎ 01665 / pop 7770

Northumberland's historic ducal town, Alnwick (no tongue gymnastics; just say 'annick'), is an elegant maze of narrow cobbled streets spread out beneath the watchful gaze of a colossal medieval castle. Not only will you find England's most perfect bookshop, but also the most visited attraction in the northeast at Alnwick Garden.

The castle is on the northern side of town and overlooks the River Aln. The **tourist office** (☎ 510665; www.alnwick.gov.uk; 2 The Shambles; 🕙 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is by the marketplace, in a handsome building that was once a butcher's shop.

There has been a market in Alnwick for more than 800 years. Market days are Thursday and Saturday, with a farmers market on the last Friday of the month.

Sights

ALNWICK CASTLE & GARDEN

The outwardly imposing **Alnwick Castle** (☎ 510 777; www.alnwickcastle.com; adult/child/concession £8.50/free/7.50; 🕙 10am-6pm Apr-Oct), ancestral home of the Duke of Northumberland and a favourite set for filmmakers, has changed little since the 14th century. The interior is sumptuous and extravagant; the six rooms open to the public – staterooms, dining room, guard chamber and library – have an incredible display of Italian paintings, including Titian's *Ecce Homo* and many Canalettos.

The castle is set in parklands designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. The woodland walk offers some great aspects of the castle, or for a view looking up the River Aln, take the B1340 towards the coast.

As spectacular a bit of green-thumb artistry as you'll see anywhere in England, **Alnwick Garden** (☎ 510777; www.alnwickgarden.com; adult/child/concession £8/free/7.50; 🕙 10am-7pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Apr, May & Oct, to 4pm Nov-Jan, to 5pm Feb & Mar) is one of the northeast's great success stories. Since the project began in 2000, the 4.8-hectare walled garden has been transformed from a derelict site into a spectacle that easily exceeds the grandeur of the castle's 19th-century gardens. A series of magnificent green spaces surround the breathtaking Grand Cascade – 120 separate jets spurting over 31,822L of water down 30-odd weirs for everyone to marvel at and kids to splash around in.

Other gardens include the Franco-Italian–influenced **Ornamental Garden** (with more than 15,000 plants) and the **Rose Garden**, with its pergola-lined paths and lots and lots of roses. It's an ongoing project: new gardens are being added all the time and 2006 saw the opening of a new visitor centre.

Sleeping & Eating

White Swan Hotel (☎ 602109; fax 510400; Bondgate Within; s/d from £59/118; 🅿) Alnwick's top address is this 300-year-old coaching inn right in the heart of town. Its rooms are all of a pretty good standard, but this spot stands out for its dining room, which has elaborate original panelling, ceiling and stained-glass windows filched from the *Olympic,* sister ship to the *Titanic*.

A row of handsome Georgian houses along Bondgate Without offer several worthwhile options that all charge around £28 per person, including **Lindisfarne Guest House** (☎ 603430; 6 Bondgate Without) and the **Teapot** (☎ 604473; 8 Bondgate Without), which has the largest teapot collection in town.

A number of atmospheric pubs do a good line in traditional food. The **Market Tavern** (☎ 602759; 7 Fenkle St; stottie £5.50), near Market Sq, is the place to go for a traditional giant beef stottie (bread roll), while **Ye Old Cross** (☎ 602735; Narrowgate; mains around £6) is good for a drink and is known as 'Bottles', after the dusty bottles in the window: 150 years ago the owner collapsed and died while trying to move them and no-one's dared attempt it since.

Getting There & Away

There are regular buses from Newcastle (501, 505 and 518; one hour, 28 per day Monday to Saturday, 18 on Sunday). Bus 518 has 10 to 14 daily services to the attractive towns of Warkworth (25 minutes) and Alnmouth (15 minutes), which has the nearest train station. Buses 505 and 525 come from Berwick (45 minutes, 13 daily Monday to Saturday). The **Arriva Day Pass** (adult/child £5/4) is good value.

WARKWORTH

☎ 01665

Biscuit-coloured Warkworth is little more than a cluster of houses around a loop in the River Coquet, but it makes for an impressive sight, especially if you arrive on the A1068 from Alnwick, when the village literally unfolds before you to reveal the craggy ruin of the enormous 14th-century castle.

A 'worm-eaten hold of ragged stone', **Warkworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 711423; adult £3.40; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Sat-Mon only Nov-Mar) features in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Parts I and II and will not disappoint modern visitors. Yes, it is still pretty worm-eaten and ragged, but it crowns an imposing site, high above the gentle, twisting river. The film *Elizabeth* (1998), starring Cate Blanchett, was filmed here.

Tiny, mystical, 14th-century **Warkworth Hermitage** (EH; admission £2.30; 🕐 11am-5pm Wed & Sun Apr-Sep), carved into the rock, is a few hundred metres upriver. Follow the signs along the path, then take possibly the world's shortest ferry ride. It's a lovely stretch of water and you can hire a **rowing boat** (adult/child per 45min £3/2.50; 🕐 Sat & Sun May-Sep).

Fourteen huge, country-style bedrooms sit above a cosy bar at the **Sun Hotel** (☎ 711259; www.rytonpark-sun.co.uk; 6 Castle Tce; s/d from £49/75, with dinner £75/104; Ⓟ), and an elegant restaurant serves local dishes given the French treatment. There are excellent views of both the castle and the river.

Right in the centre of the village the **Greenhouse** (☎ 712322; 21 Dial Pl; mains £7-13; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon & Wed-Sat, lunch only Sun) is a café-bistro that serves great coffee, cakes and more substantial fish and meat dishes on large pine tables.

Bus 518 links Newcastle (1½ hours, hourly), Warkworth, Alnmouth and Alnwick. There's a train station on the main east-coast line, about 1.5 miles west of town.

FARNE ISLANDS

One of England's most incredible sea-bird conventions is to be found on a rocky archipelago of islands about 3 miles offshore from the undistinguished fishing village of **Seahouses**. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 01665-720884; Seafield Rd; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) near the harbour in Seahouses and a **National Trust Shop** (☎ 01665-721099; 16 Main St; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) for all island-specific information.

The best time to visit the **Farne Islands** (NT; ☎ 01665-720651; admission £5.20, in Apr, Aug & Sep £4.20; 🕐 10.30am-6pm Apr, Aug & Sep, Inner Farne also 1.30-5pm May-Jul, Staple also 10.30am-1.30pm May-Jul) is during breeding season (roughly May to July), when you can see feeding chicks of 20 species of sea bird, including puffin, kittiwake, Arctic tern, eider duck, cormorant and gull. This is a quite extraordinary experience, for there are few places in the world where you can get so close to nesting sea birds. The islands are also home to England's only colony of grey seals.

To protect the islands from environmental damage, only two are accessible to the public: Inner Farne and Staple Island. Inner Farne is the more interesting of the two, as it is also the site of a tiny chapel (1370, restored 1848) built in memory of St Cuthbert, who lived here for a spell and died here in 687.

Getting There & Away

There are various tours, from 1½-hour cruises to all-day specials, and they get going from 10am April to October. Crossings can be rough, and may be impossible in bad weather. Some of the boats have no proper cabin, so make sure you've got warm, waterproof clothing if there's a chance of rain. Also recommended is an old hat – those birds sure can ruin a head of hair!

Of the operators from the dock in Seahouses, **Billy Shiel** (☎ 01665-720308; www.farne-islands.com; 3hr tour adult/child £12/8, all-day tour with landing £25/15) is recommended – he even got an MBE for his troubles.

BAMBURGH

☎ 01668

Bamburgh is all about the castle, a massive, imposing structure high up on a basalt crag and visible for miles around. The village itself – a tidy fist of houses around a pleasant green – isn't half bad, but it's really just about the castle, a solid contender for England's best.

Bamburgh Castle (☎ 214515; www.bamburghcastle.com; adult/child £6/2.50; 🕐 11am-5pm mid-Mar–Oct) is built around a powerful Norman keep and played a key role in the border wars. It was restored in the 19th century by the great industrialist Lord Armstrong, who also turned his passion to Cragside (p642) and was the owner of Jesmond Dene House in Newcastle (p623). The great halls within are still home to the Armstrong family. It's just inland from long open stretches of empty white-sand beach, ideal for blustery walks.

Sleeping & Eating

Victoria Hotel (☎ 214431; www.victoriahotel.net; Front St; s/d from £50/100; Ⓟ) Overlooking the village green is this handsome hotel with bedrooms decorated with quality antiques and – in the superior rooms – handcrafted four-posters. Here you'll also find the best restaurant in town, with a surprisingly adventurous menu (mains £12 to £14) where, for instance, chorizo is preferred over Cumberland sausage.

Bamburgh Hall (☎ 214230; cresswell@farming.co.uk; r £80; Ⓟ) This magnificent farmhouse built in 1697 has only one room, but we highly recommend it for the sheer pleasure of the views, right down to the sea, and the huge breakfast, served in the very dining room where the Jacobite officers met during the rebellion of 1715.

our pick **Waren House Hotel** (☎ 214581; www.warenhousehotel.co.uk; Waren Mill; d/ste £137/184) This most romantic of getaway hotels presents a delicious dilemma: whether to spend more time enjoying the superb setting, overlooking Budle Bay and Holy Island to the east and the Cheviot Hills to the west, or to lock yourself indoors and lose yourself in the luxurious trappings (try the three-course dinner, £27) of this magnificent house. The hotel is in the small hamlet of Waren Mill, 2 miles northwest of Bamburgh along the B1340.

The **Copper Kettle** (☎ 214361; 22 Front St; afternoon tea £4-6) is a gift shop with a pleasant tea room; you can stock up for a picnic at the **Pantry** (☎ 214455; 13 Front St; sandwiches £2-4).

Getting There & Away

Bus 501 runs from Newcastle (2¼ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday) stopping at Alnwick and Seahouses. Bus 401 or 501 from Alnwick (four to six daily) takes one hour.

HOLY ISLAND (LINDISFARNE)

☎ 01289

Holy Island is often referred to as an unearthly place, and while a lot of this talk is just that (and a little bit of bring-'em-in tourist bluster), there *is* something almost other-worldly about this small island (it's only 2 sq miles). It's tricky to get to, as it's connected to the mainland by a narrow, glinting causeway that only appears at low tide. It's also fiercely desolate and isolated, barely any different from when St Aidan came to what was then known as Lindisfarne to found a monastery in 635.

As you cross the empty flats to get here, it's not difficult to imagine the marauding Vikings that repeatedly sacked the settlement between 793 and 875, when the monks finally took the hint and left. They carried with them the illuminated *Lindisfarne Gospels* (now in the British Library in London) and the miraculously preserved body of St Cuthbert, who lived here for a couple of years but preferred the hermit's life on Inner Farne. A priory was re-established in the 11th century but didn't survive the dissolution in 1537.

The island's peculiar isolation is best appreciated midweek or preferably out of season. Whatever you do, pay attention to the crossing-time information, available at tourist offices and on notice boards throughout the area. Every year there is a handful of go-it-alone fools who are caught midway by the incoming tide and have to abandon their cars.

Sights

Lindisfarne Priory (EH; ☎ 389200; admission £3.70; 🕐 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Feb & Mar, 10am-2pm Sat-Mon Nov-Jan) consists of elaborate red and grey ruins and the later 13th-century St Mary the Virgin Church. The recently refurbished museum next to these displays the remains of the first monastery and tells the story of the monastic community before and after the dissolution.

Twenty pages of the luminescent *Lindisfarne Gospels* are on view electronically at the **Lindisfarne Heritage Centre** (☎ 389004; www.holy-island.info; Marygate; adult/child £3/free; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, according to tides Nov-Mar), which also has displays on the locality.

Half a mile from the village stands the tiny, storybook **Lindisfarne Castle** (NT; ☎ 389244; adult £4; 🕐 10.30-3pm or noon-4.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), built in 1550, and extended and converted by Sir Edwin Lutyens from 1902 to 1910 for Mr

Hudson, the owner of *Country Life* magazine. You can imagine some decadent parties have graced its alluring rooms – Jay Gatsby would have been proud. Its opening times may be extended depending on the tide. A **shuttle bus** (☎ 389236) runs here from the car park.

Sleeping & Eating

It's possible to stay on the island, but you'll need to book in advance.

Open Gate (☎ 389222; theopengate@theopengate.ndo.co.uk; Marygate; s/d £32/54) This spacious Elizabethan stone farmhouse with comfortable rooms caters primarily to those looking for a contemplative experience – you're not so much charged a room rate as 'encouraged' to give the listed price as a donation. There is a small chapel in the basement and a room full of books on Celtic spirituality, and there are organised retreats throughout the year.

Ship (☎ 389311; www.theshipinn-holyisland.co.uk; Marygate; s/d/tr £52/68/90) Three exceptionally comfortable rooms – one with a four-poster – sit above an 18th-century public house known here as the Tavern. There's good local seafood in the bar.

Getting There & Around

Holy Island can be reached by bus 477 from Berwick (Wednesday and Saturday only, Monday to Saturday July and August). People taking cars across are requested to park in one of the signposted car parks (£5 per day). The sea covers the causeway and cuts the island off from the mainland for about five hours each day. Tide times are listed at tourist offices, in local papers and at each side of the crossing.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED

☎ 01289 / pop 12,870

This salt-crusted fortress town is England's northernmost city and the holder of two unique honours: it is the most fought-over settlement in European history (between 1174 and 1482 it changed hands 14 times between the Scots and the English), and its football team, Berwick Rangers, are the only English team to play in the Scottish League – albeit at the low-level third division in 2006–07.

The **tourist office** (☎ 330733; www.berwick-upon-tweed.gov.uk; 106 Marygate; 🕐 10am-6pm Easter-Jun, to 5pm Jul-Sep, to 4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) is helpful. Access the net at **Berwick Backpackers** (☎ 331481; 56-58 Bridge St; per 20min £2).

Sights & Activities

Berwick's superb **walls** (EH; admission free) were begun in 1558 to reinforce an earlier set built during the reign of Edward II. They represented state-of-the-art military technology of the day and were designed both to house artillery (in arrowhead-shaped bastions) and to withstand it (the walls are low and massively thick, but it's still a long way to fall).

You can walk almost the entire length of the walls, a circuit of about a mile. It's a must, with wonderful, wide-open views. Only a small fragment remains of the once mighty **border castle**, by the train station. The tourist office has a brochure describing the main sights.

Recommended are the one-hour **guided walks** (adult/child £3.50/free; 🕐 10am, 11.15am, 12.30pm & 2pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct) starting from the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of B&Bs around the town, most of which offer fairly basic but comfortable rooms; the tourist office can assist in finding one.

Berwick Backpackers (☎ 331481; www.berwickbackpackers.co.uk; 56-58 Bridge St; dm/s/d from £12/14.95/34; 💻) This excellent hostel, basically a series of rooms in the outhouses of a Georgian home around a central courtyard, has one large comfortable dorm, a single and two doubles, all with en suite. It also has net access. Highly recommended.

our pick **No 1 Sallyport** (☎ 308827; www.1sallyport-bedandbreakfast.com; 1 Sallyport, off Bridge St; r £90-140) Not just the best in town, but one of the best B&Bs in Britain. There are only five suites – each carefully appointed to fit the theme. The Manhattan Loft, crammed into the attic, makes the minimalist most of the confined space; the Lowry Room is a country-style Georgian classic; the Smuggler's Suite has a separate sitting room complete with widescreen TV, DVD players and plenty of space to lounge around in. Two new suites were added in 2005: the executive Madison and the superfancy Tiffany.

Magna Tandoori (☎ 302736; 39 Bridge St; mains £6-12; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) There's nothing much in this handsome Georgian room to suggest an Indian restaurant, but the huge menu, chock-full of dishes, makes this the best of its kind in town.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses stop on Golden Sq (where Marygate becomes Castlegate); there are good links from Berwick into the Scottish Borders; there are buses west to Coldstream, Kelso and Galashiels. Buses 505, 515 and 525 go to Newcastle (2¼ hours, five daily) via Alnwick. Bus 253 goes to Edinburgh (two hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) via Dunbar.

TRAIN

Berwick is almost exactly halfway between Edinburgh (£16, 50 minutes) and Newcastle (£15.30, 50 minutes) on the main east-coast London–Edinburgh line. Half-hourly trains between Edinburgh and Newcastle stop in Berwick.

Getting Around

The town centre is compact and walkable; if you're feeling lazy try **Berwick Taxis** (☎ 307771). **Tweed Bicycles** (☎ 331476; 17a Bridge St) hires out mountain bikes for £18 per day.

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK

There can surely be no greater wilderness left in England today than the 398 sq miles of natural wonderland that is Northumberland National Park, home to the soft swells of the Cheviot Hills and the seemingly endless spiky moors of autumn-coloured heather and gorse. Even the negligible human influence – there are only about 2000 inhabitants here – has been benevolent: the finest sections of Hadrian's Wall run along the park's southern edge and the challenging landscape is dotted with prehistoric remains and fortified houses – the thick-walled *peles* that were the only solid buildings constructed here until the mid-18th century.

Orientation & Information

The park runs from Hadrian's Wall in the south, takes in the Simonside Hills in the east and runs into the Cheviot Hills along the Scottish border. There are few roads.

For information, contact the **Northumberland National Park** (☎ 01434-605555; www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk; Eastburn, South Park, Hexham). Besides the tourist offices mentioned in this section, there are relevant offices in **Once Brewed** (☎ 01434-344396; 🕐 10am-5pm mid-Mar–May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Aug) as well as **Ingram** (☎ 01665-578890; ingram@nnpa.org.uk; 🕐 10am-5pm Easter-Oct). All the tourist offices handle accommodation bookings.

Walking & Cycling

The most spectacular stretch of the Hadrian's Wall Path (p633) is between Sewingshields and Greenhead in the south of the park.

There are many fine walks into the Cheviots, frequently passing by prehistoric remnants; contact the Ingram, Wooler and Rothbury tourist offices for information.

Though at times strenuous, cycling in the park is a pleasure; the roads are good and the traffic is light in this part of Northumberland. There's off-road cycling in Border Forest Park.

Getting There & Around

Public transport options are limited, aside from buses on the A69. See the Hadrian's Wall section (p634) for access to the south. Bus 808 (55 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday) runs between Otterburn and Newcastle. Postbus 815 and bus 880 (45 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) run between Hexham and Bellingham. National Express 383 (£15, three hours, one daily) goes from Newcastle to Edinburgh via Otterburn, Byrness (by request), Jedburgh, Melrose and Galashiels.

BELLINGHAM

☎ 01434

The small, remote village of Bellingham (bellin-*jum*) is a pleasant enough spot on the banks of the Tyne, surrounded by beautiful, deserted countryside on all sides. It is an excellent base from which to kick off your exploration of the park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 220616; Main St; 🕐 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) handles visitor inquiries.

There's not a lot to see here save the 12th-century **St Cuthbert's Church**, unique because it retains its original stone roof, and **Cuddy's Well**, outside the churchyard wall, which is alleged to have healing powers on account of its blessing by the saint.

The **Hareshaw Linn Walk** passes through a wooded valley and over six bridges, leading to a 9m-high waterfall 2.5 miles north of Bellingham (*linn* is an Old English name for waterfall).

Sleeping & Eating

Bellingham is on the Pennine Way; book ahead for accommodation in summer. Most of the B&Bs are clustered around the village green.

Bellingham YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5694; www.yha.org.uk; Woodburn Rd; dm £10.95; ⏲ mid-Apr–Oct) A cedarwood cabin with spartan facilities on the edge of the village, this hostel is almost always busy, so be sure to book ahead. There are showers, a cycle store and a self-catering kitchen on the premises.

Lyndale Guest House (☎ 220361; www.lyndaleguesthouse.co.uk; s/d from £22/44) The bedrooms in this pleasant family home just off the village green are modern and extremely tidy; it's a bit like visiting a really neat relative.

Pub grub is about the extent of the village's dining; recommended is the Black Bull or the Rose & Crown.

ROTHBURY

☎ 01669 / pop 1960

The one-time prosperous Victorian resort of Rothbury is an attractive, restful market town on the River Coquet that makes a convenient base for the Cheviots.

There's a **tourist office & visitor centre** (☎ 620887; Church St; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct, to 6pm Jun-Aug) in town.

The biggest draw in the immediate vicinity is **Cragside House, Garden & Estate** (NT; ☎ 620 333), the quite incredible country retreat of the first Lord Armstrong. In the 1880s the house had hot and cold running water, a telephone and alarm system, and was the first in the world to be lit by electricity, generated through hydropower. It was closed throughout 2006 but at the time of writing was expected to reopen in April 2007 – call for details of admission price and opening times.

The Victorian gardens are well worth exploring. Huge and remarkably varied, they feature lakes, moors and one of the world's largest rock gardens. Visit in May to see myriad rhododendrons.

The estate is 1 mile north of town on the B6341; there is no public transport to the front gates from Rothbury – try **Rothbury Motors** (☎ 620516) if you need a taxi.

High St is a good area to look for a place to stay.

Beamed ceilings, stone fireplaces and canopied four-poster beds make **Katerina's Guest House** (☎ 602334; Sun Buildings, High St; www.katerinasguesthouse.co.uk; s/d from £40/64) one of the nicer options in town, though the rooms are a little small.

Other similarly priced options include **Alexander House** (☎ 621463; s/d £38/55) and the **Haven** (☎ 620577; Back Crofts; s/d £32/54), up on a hill.

Food options are limited to pub grub. For takeaway you could try the **Rothbury Bakery** (High St) for pies and sandwiches or **Tully's** (High St) for flapjacks.

Bus 416 from Morpeth (30 minutes) leaves every two hours Monday to Saturday and three times on Sunday.

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North Wales

North Wales is a magical mix of medieval heritage and outstanding natural beauty, where you're never far from golden beaches or soaring summits. Hikers, climbers, cyclists and all manner of adrenaline junkies flock here from miles around. Snowdonia National Park is the crowning glory. Here, the highest peaks in Wales and England jut magnificently to the heavens – all too often set against moody, overcast skies. The Rivers Treweryn and Dee provide invigorating rafting and canoeing, while the less energetic can ride some of Britain's most scenic railways, of which the Ffestiniog and Cambrian Coast lines are the finest.

History hounds will love the otherworldly charms of the formidable castles at Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris, and the wonderfully over-elaborate Portmeirion, an Italianate village in a romantic seaside setting.

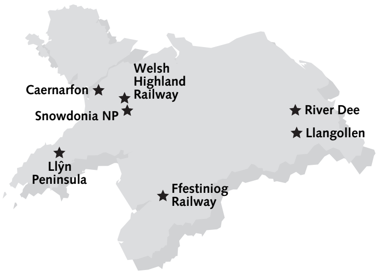
The northern coast is best known for the Victorian splendour of Llandudno, a classical British resort town. To the east, the impeccable Erddig country house and bustling town of Llangollen, with its International Eisteddfod, vie for attention with the spectacular mountains of the west.

To the northwest lies the most ardent Welsh-speaking area of the country. The mountains that hypnotise today's walkers and rock climbers also defied the marauding English invaders of the 15th century, and the spirit remains even among the modern-day youth. The Llŷn Peninsula, wild, rocky and less frequented, remains particularly proud.

The Isle of Anglesey has a greater concentration of prehistoric sites than anywhere else in

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beachcombing on the exposed **Llŷn Peninsula** (p743)
- Topping out on one of **Snowdonia's untamed peaks** (p721)
- Embracing the world at Llangollen's **International Eisteddfod** (see boxed text, p717)
- Storming the ramparts at **Caernarfon Castle** (p740), Edward I's most impressive stronghold
- Getting steamy on the vintage **Welsh Highland Railway** and **Ffestiniog Railway**(p730)
- Shooting the rapids on the frothy **River Dee** (p719)



POPULATION: 663,397

AREA: 2382 SQ MILES

Orientation & Information

The breathtaking Snowdonia mountains dominate this part of Wales. Containing the highest British peaks outside Scotland, they are the focus of the large Snowdonia National Park, which extends virtually from the north coast almost as far south as Machynlleth. Anglesey lies offshore to the northwest and the Llŷn Peninsula points west out to sea.

All major towns have tourist offices, with those in Snowdonia and the main coastal resorts being particularly well informed.

Gwynedd, the most northwesterly county, is a heartland of Welsh nationalism where around 70% of people use the mother tongue.

Activities

North Wales is crammed with adrenaline-pumping activities. The biggest attraction is **Snowdonia National Park**, where jagged peaks meet green wooded valleys, rolling hills and swaths of golden sand.

This is prime territory for walking, climbing, pony trekking, mountain biking and road cycling. The park is also home to two national activity centres. **Canolfan Tryweryn**, near Bala (the national white-water centre), and **Plas y Brenin**, at Capel Curig (the national mountain centre).

Heading west, the exposed **Llŷn Peninsula** has great water sports, while the **Isle of Anglesey** has gentle, rolling countryside that contrasts sharply with the harsh mountains of the park and provides less-strenuous walking with stunning coastal scenery.

East of Snowdonia, Llangollen is another white-water hot spot, thanks to the dependable rapids of the River Dee.

For full information, see the detailed entries in the Northeastern Wales and Snowdonia National Park sections in this chapter.

Getting There & Around

All tourist offices stock detailed bus timetables, and you can check details with **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk). An extensive network of routes is in operation, but Sunday services are usually limited (especially in more-remote areas).

North Wales' rail links are good. Contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) for times and fares. Major routes include the North Wales Coast Line from Chester to the ferry terminal at Holyhead, the Cambrian Coaster Line from Machynlleth to Pwllheli and the Conwy Valley Line from Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestiniog. One-way fares to Llandudno/Machynlleth start at £63/60 from London, £25/10.50 from Birmingham and £20/25 from Manchester.

The good-value multiday North & Mid Wales Rover (£30) offers three days' bus and train travel (including the Ffestiniog Railway) in seven days. Buy it from **Arriva Trains** (☎ 0870 9000 777), online at www.walesflexipass.co.uk, or at most railway stations. The Gwynedd Red Rover (£4.95) is valid on buses within south, central and northwest Snowdonia, the Llŷn Peninsula and some services in northeast Snowdonia (to Betws-y-Coed and Llandudno); buy it from the driver.

NORTHEASTERN WALES

The north Wales coast has its charms, but there are some kiss-me-quick, candyfloss resorts that you would be better off avoiding. No problem, because most visitors are heading for Snowdonia National Park and its giddying array of spectacular outdoor adventures.

En route you might fancy stopping at the stately home of Erddig, near Wrexham, or taking time out for a white-water jaunt at Llangollen, worth a visit in its own right for the International Eisteddfod each July.

For travel details see Getting There & Away under Wrexham and Llangollen in this section.

WREXHAM (WRECSAM)

☎ 01978 / pop 63,084

Wrexham is an uninspiring town – the only real attraction is nearby Erddig, a magnificent, stately 18th-century country home and estate.

The **tourist office** (☎ 292015; www.borderlands.co.uk; Lambpit St; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is open year-round, but closed on Sunday.

Sights

As recently as 1973 the Yorke family lived at **Erddig** (NT; ☎ 355314; adult/child £7/4; 🕐 house noon-5pm Sat-Wed Easter-Jun & Sep, noon-5pm Sat-Thu Jul & Aug, noon-4pm Oct, garden 11am-6pm Sat-Wed Easter-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Sat-Thu Jul & Aug, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov–mid-Dec), and the house sheds rare light into the 'upstairs–downstairs' relationship between Britain's nobility and their servants. The Yorkes lived here for more than 200 years, being known for the respect with which they treated their staff. Upstairs is a fine collection of furniture, including an impressive state bed, and original Chinese wallpaper. Downstairs are interesting photographs of servants and various household devices such as a box-mangle. The 800-hectare country park provides pleasant walking. Erddig has a licensed restaurant and a more low-key café that serves drinks and snacks.

Due to Erddig's popularity, timed admission tickets may be issued. The house lies 2 miles south of Wrexham, off the A525 road to Whitchurch.

Sleeping

Grove Guest House (☎ 354288; 36 Chester Rd; s/d from £27/52) is a 10-minute walk from the railway station and is convenient for visiting Erddig.

Getting There & Away

National Express (☎ 08705 808080) has good services. Coach 420 runs to London daily (£21, five hours) via Birmingham, the 381 to Manchester (£5.70, 1¼ hours) and the 550 to Liverpool (£6.20, one hour).

Local bus services link Wrexham with Chester, such as bus 1 (40 minutes, every 10 minutes, hourly on Sunday) and the 555, X5 and X94 with Llangollen (30 minutes, every 15 minutes, fewer on Sunday).

Wrexham is on the Chester–Birmingham train line, with services from Chester (15 minutes, about hourly) and Birmingham (£17, 1½ hours, hourly).

LLANGOLLEN

☎ 01978 / pop 2930

Lively Llangollen boasts archetypal British scenery, huddled in the fertile Vale of Llangollen around the banks of the tumbling River Dee. The town is famous for the annual International Eisteddfod, held every July to promote world peace through music, song and dance.

The river makes a good focal point, a pleasant place to sit and slurp an ice cream before mooching the backstreets for antiques and local crafts. Kids love the horse-drawn canal-boat trips, while train buffs drool over the handsome steam railway. Ruined Valle Crucis Abbey is close by and spectacular views over the town can be gained from Castell Dinas Brân. Thrill-seekers enjoy water sports on the Dee's rapids, and outdoor pursuits in the surrounding hills.

Engineer Thomas Telford, the Scottish 'Colossus of Roads', propelled the town into the 19th century by routing both the London–Holyhead (A5) road and the Llangollen Canal through it. Two miles up the canal is the scenic weir at Horseshoe Falls, while down the canal is a Telford masterpiece, the towering Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.

EISTEDDFODAU FOR ALL

The **National Eisteddfod** (www.eisteddfod.org.uk), pronounced *ey-steth-vot*, is a celebration of Welsh culture and is Europe's largest festival of competitive music-making and poetry. Descended from ancient bardic tournaments, it attracts more than 150,000 visitors and 6000 competitors annually.

Conducted in Welsh, the festival welcomes all. Foreigners come in search of Welsh ancestry, while musical fringe events featuring local bands lend a slight Glastonbury atmosphere. It's held in early August, and the venue swings annually between north and south Wales: in 2007 it heads north to Wrexham; in 2008 Cardiff represents the south.

Urdd Eisteddfod (www.urdd.org) is a separate young people's festival – urdd *(irth)* is Welsh for 'youth' – held every May at changing venues (2007 Carmarthenshire, 2008 Conwy County). The format resembles its bigger brother, although any self-respecting teenager prefers to hang out on the fringe at the main event.

Most famous is the **International Eisteddfod** (www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk), established after WWII to promote international harmony. Held every July in Llangollen, the event pulls up to 5000 participants from more than 40 countries as diverse as Kurdistan and Nigeria, transforming the town into a global village. In addition to daily folk music and dancing competitions, gala concerts feature international stars. In 2006, with the event celebrating its 60th birthday, Katherine Jenkins topped the bill. Demonstrating the influence of the festival, it was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

Orientation & Information

You can walk around Llangollen in 15 minutes. The **tourist office** (☎ 860828; www.nwt.co.uk; Castle St; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar) is in the old chapel. Free internet access is available upstairs at the **library** (☎ 869600).

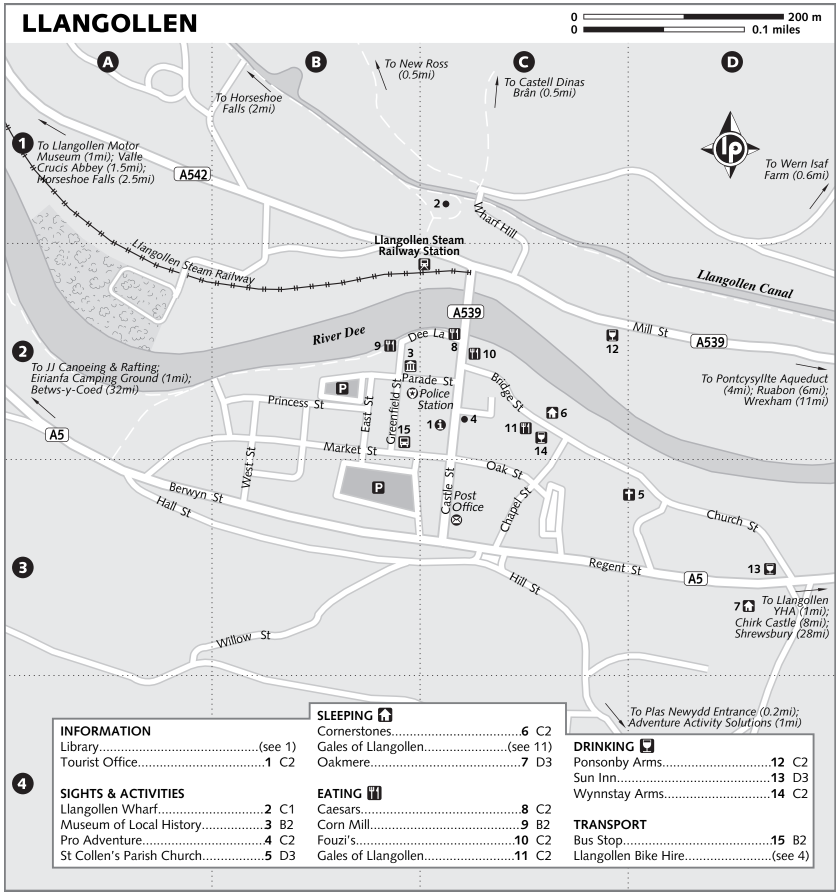
Sights

Ornate **Plas Newydd** (☎ 861314; adult £3; 🕘 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) was home to the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and the Honourable Sarah Ponsonby (see boxed text, p720). A bizarre mix of Gothic and Tudor styles, the house has pleasant formal gardens that are home to the font from Valle Crucis Abbey. The house lies 400m uphill southeast of the town centre, but don't confuse it with the National Trust stately home of the same name on Anglesey. Last entry is at 4.15pm.

Llangollen Steam Railway (☎ 860979; www.llangollen-railway.co.uk; return trip £8; 🕘 daily Easter-Oct, most Sat & Sun year-round) chugs through another era on its 8-mile route to Carrog, passing through picturesque Berwyn and the Horseshoe Falls. The tourist office has timetables.

Horse-drawn canal trips depart from **Llangollen Wharf** (☎ 860702; www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk) opposite the railway station. Choose from a 45-minute trip (£4.50) or the motorised two-hour, one-way cruise to Telford's astounding 38m-high Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (£9).

The 6th-century **St Collen's Parish Church** (Church St; 🕘 2-6pm Mon-Fri mid-May–Sep) has an exquisite carved-oak roof as well as a memorial to the Ladies of Llangollen, who lie in the graveyard.


LLANGOLLEN
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4
To New Ross (0.5mi)
To Castell Dinas Brân (0.5mi)
To Horseshoe Falls (2mi)
To Llangollen Motor Museum (1mi); Valle Crucis Abbey (1.5mi); Horseshoe Falls (2.5mi)
A542
To Wern Isaf Farm (0.6mi)
Wharf Hill
Llangollen Steam Railway Station
Llangollen Steam Railway
Llangollen Canal
River Dee
A539
Dee La
Mill St
Parade St
Police Station
Bridge St
To JJ Canoeing & Rafting; Eirianfa Camping Ground (1mi); Betws-y-Coed (32mi)
To Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (4mi); Ruabon (6mi); Wrexham (11mi)
Princess St
East St
Greenfield St
A5
Market St
West St
Oak St
Castle St
Post Office
Chapel St
Berwyn St
Hall St
Church St
Regent St
Hill St
To Llangollen YHA (1mi); Chirk Castle (8mi); Shrewsbury (28mi)
Willow St
To Plas Newydd Entrance (0.2mi); Adventure Activity Solutions (1mi)
P
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Llangollen's small **Museum of Local History** (☎ 862862; www.llangollenmuseum.co.uk; Parade St; admission free; 🕘 10am-4pm) has interesting local heritage archives, including photographs and Bronze Age artefacts.

Atop the conical hill above the town sits the ruins of 16th-century **Castell Dinas Brân**. The walk up is exhilarating, and the views are fantastic.

Atmospheric and peaceful, the well-tended 13th- and 14th-century ruins of **Valle Crucis Abbey** (Cadw; ☎ 860326; adult/child £2.50/2, admission free Oct-Mar; 🕘 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) occupy a picturesque setting, 1.5 miles northwest of town on the A542 to Ruthin.

Activities

Walk along the canal towpath to the weir at Horseshoe Falls or climb to Castell Dinas Brân (the tourist office stocks walking literature). Bryn Hughes of **Ceiriog Country Holidays** (☎ 01691-718398; www.ceiriog.com/country.html) leads guided walks and can arrange accommodation.

There's ample opportunity for adventure sports. Rafting, canoeing, gorge-walking, rock climbing, and more, can be found at the following places:

Adventure Activity Solutions (☎ 845009; Berwyn Rd) AAS can take you sailing, windsurfing and even hot-air ballooning.

JJ Canoeing & Rafting (☎ 860763; www.jjraftcanoe.com; Berwyn Rd; 2hr rafting Sun-Fri £40, Sat £45) A mile west of town, specialising in water sports but also abseiling, paintballing and archery, and with a decent café on site.

Pro Adventure (☎ 861912; www.proadventure.co.uk; 23 Castle St; 2hr rafting beginners/advanced £50/65) After a river trip, take a survival course or an introduction to mountaineering at Lockwood's Chimney.

Festivals & Events

Llangollen is the permanent venue of the **International Eisteddfod** (see the boxed text, p717), an annual knees-up of international folk music, song and dance.

Sleeping

The best accommodation is in B&Bs and guesthouses. Book in advance for the Eisteddfod.

Llangollen YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5932; llangollen@yha.org.uk; dm £12) This large Victorian mansion, 1.5 miles east of town, targets groups on activity breaks – book ahead for casual visits.

HEY, HEY MISTER BLUE SKY

In 2006 travel company Expedia published a list of the world's top 20 blue-sky views, and the vista from **Castell Dinas Brân** in Llangollen made the top 10. Only narrowly pipped by the cosmopolitan likes of Rio de Janeiro, Denarau Island in Fiji and Antananarivo in Madagascar, the north Wales panorama was commended for its tonal colour, clarity, brightness and cloud density. Locals have never felt more like singing the blues…

Cornerstones (☎ 861569; www.cornerstones-guesthouse.co.uk; 15 Bridge St; s/d from £35/60; ☒ wi-fi) Got your laptop? Good, because you can surf away here in a house boasting original 16th-century features (exposed beams and open fireplaces) but lacking no 21st-century luxuries.

Oakmere (☎ 861126; www.oakmere.llangollen.co.uk; Regent St; s/d £45/60; ☒) Set back from the road, this imposing Victorian mansion speaks quality from the moment you enter the door. The beautiful presentation incorporates restored features and striking oak furniture. Located at the east end of town.

Gales of Llangollen (☎ 860089; www.galesofllangollen.co.uk; 18 Bridge St; s/d £50/60, ste £5 extra; ☒) Belonging to the wine bar of the same name, rooms at Gales are a mix of 18th-century charm, modern conveniences and old-school swirly carpets. The larger suites are good value.

Pitch a tent at **Eirianfa Camping Ground** (☎ 860919; Berwyn Rd; 2-person tent sites £10), 1 mile west of Llangollen, or go across the river and trek eastwards (uphill) to reach friendly **Wern Isaf Farm** (☎ 860632; 2-person tent sites £8).

Eating

Fouzi's (☎ 861340; lunches £3.45-5.50) Amid Llangollen's swathe of blue-rinse, geriatric tearooms, try this slice of urban chic for a coffee or lunchtime snack.

Corn Mill (☎ 869555; Dee Lane; mains £6-12.50; 🕘 noon-9pm) If the sun's shining, laze on the stylish wooden deck while chowing down at this renovated riverside eatery. Tuck in to fresh swordfish or local lamb, and should the heavens open, make a quick dash for the elegant indoor bar.

Caesars (☎ 860133; Dee Lane; mains £9-15; 🕘 lunch & dinner) By the bridge, Caesars uses fresh ingredients to tickle the taste buds with wonders

LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN

Lady Eleanor Butler and the Honourable Sarah Ponsonby, the Ladies of Llangollen, lived in Plas Newydd from 1780 to 1829 with their maid Mary Carryl. Their love affair blossomed in Ireland and, after their Anglo-Irish families discouraged the relationship, they eloped to Wales disguised as men in an attempt to start a new life. They settled in Llangollen, devoting themselves to 'friendship, celibacy and the knitting of stockings'.

Their relationship became well known, so much so that national and literary figures of the day, including the Duke of Wellington and William Wordsworth, paid them visits. Wordsworth penned the charming words 'sisters in love, a love allowed to climb, even on this earth above the reach of time', although he was less enamoured with Plas Newydd, calling it a 'low browed cot'.

The ladies were very close to Mary who, having managed to buy the freehold to Plas Newydd, bequeathed it to them after her death. Lady Eleanor died in 1829, Sarah Ponsonby two years later. They are buried at St Collen's Parish Church in the centre of Llangollen.

such as crispy duck in port and orange. Set lunch and evening menus offer value – bag a window table for a hairy seat overhanging the river.

Gales of Llangollen (☎ 860089; www.galesofllangollen.co.uk; 18 Bridge St; mains £10-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Wine bars might seem like a 1980s phenomena, and, yes, prawn cocktail *is* on the menu, but Gales is still going strong after 30 years of serving up traditional contemporary grub to locals and visiting punters alike. Good wine list as well.

Drinking & Entertainment

The **Wynnstay Arms** (☎ 860710; Bridge St) is probably the best boozer in town, although there's also decent beer and live music at the **Sun Inn** (☎ 860233; Regent St). For a younger feel try the **Ponsonby Arms** (☎ 861119; Mill St), named after one of the Ladies of Llangollen.

Getting There & Away

National Express coach 420 runs daily to Wrexham (30 minutes). For London (£25, 5½ hours), the service passes through Birmingham and Shrewsbury.

Buses 555 and X5 run to Wrexham from Monday to Saturday (30 minutes, every 15 minutes). Snowdonia services are less frequent; from Monday to Saturday the X19 runs four times per day to Betws-y-Coed (one hour) and Llandudno (two hours), with two services on Sunday. From Monday to Friday the X94 runs 10 times daily to Bala and Dolgellau, with nine services on Saturday and four on Sunday.

The nearest main-line train station (steam doesn't count) is Ruabon on the Shrewsbury–Chester line; Shrewsbury to Ruabon (30 minutes, at least every two hours). A taxi from Ruabon costs about £8 – call **Premier Cars** (☎ 861999). To reach Llanberis, take the bus to Wrexham and hop on the train there.

AROUND LLANGOLLEN

Chirk Castle

If you want a superb example of a 14th-century Marcher **castle** (NT; ☎ 01691-777701; adult/child £7/3.50; 🕒 noon-5pm Wed-Sun Easter-Jun & Sep, noon-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, noon-4pm Wed-Sun Oct), then this is the place to come. Surprisingly, it's still inhabited – in 1595 the Myddelton family moved in and began the slow transformation of the castle from stout defender to elegant residence. Chirk Castle lies 8 miles southeast of Llangollen, 2 miles west of Chirk village, and has fine views over the English borderlands.

SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK (PARC CENEDLAETHOL ERYRI)

In a country overflowing with uplands, Snowdonia National Park reigns supreme, with the highest mountains and steepest valleys of any Welsh region. Dive into the rocky clefts and scramble up the slopes, armed with walking boots, crampons, or just a widening pair of eyes, for guaranteed excitement. The sea is so close that visitors can easily shift in pace between challenging terrain and relaxing sandy beaches.

Mt Snowdon (1085m) is the highest piece of rock in Wales and England. No world-beater in elevation, it nonetheless strikes a noble pose atop a precipitous horseshoe of jagged peaks. Scaling the summit, on foot or by mountain railway, is the goal of many visitors – the park was created in 1951 as much to prevent the peak from being over-loved as from being neglected or built upon. Plenty of other mountain-hiking options are scattered across this extensive region, from the neighbouring ranges of the Carneddau and Glyders to Cader Idris above Dolgellau in the south. Rock climbing, white-water rafting, mountain biking and pony trekking are also excellent.

The surrounding coastline features the World Heritage–listed chain of wonderful medieval castles at Caernarfon, Harlech, Conwy and Beaumaris, each attached to a town of some charm.

Hard-won mineral treasures – copper, gold and slate – buried deep in the mountains permitted the inhabitants a tough living through the ages. Several mines now operate as visitor attractions, along with vintage railways such as the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland lines, which once hauled the booty down to the sea. The area's high rainfall is cannily exploited by hydroelectric power stations; the Electric Mountain at Llanberis is one massive underground scheme you can see for yourself.

Orientation & Information

Snowdonia is the fourth-largest of Britain's 14 national parks, after the Cairngorms in Scotland and the South Downs and Lake District areas of England. While Mt Snowdon is the focus, the park covers 840 sq miles (2200 sq km). The boundaries extend fully 35 miles east–west and 50 miles north–south towards Mid Wales.

Major tourist towns have informative tourist offices that provide bed-booking services and weather information. Snowdonia National Park information centres can be found at Betws-y-Coed and Dolgellau (both open year-round), and from Easter to October at Blaenau Ffestiniog, Harlech and Beddgelert. Excellent online information is available at www.eryri-npa.gov.uk and www.visitsnowdonia.info.

The park's 24-hour weather number is ☎ 09068 500449 (premium rate).

Activities

ACTIVITY CENTRES

North Wales has two national activity centres:

Canolfan Tryweryn – the National Whitewater Centre (☎ 01678-521083; www.ukrafting.co.uk) A trusty 1.5-mile stretch of the River Tryweryn, near Bala, provides top rafting, canoeing and kayaking. For aquaphobes, try activities such as clay-pigeon shooting or bushcraft skills.

Plas y Brenin – the National Mountain Centre (☎ 01690-720214; www.pyb.co.uk) Based at Capel Curig, this is the place to learn climbing, mountain biking and summit leadership. If you're confident enough to go it alone, the centre has a great equipment-rental service.

CYCLING

Dedicated mountain-bike venues with signposted, graded routes include top spot Coed-y-Brenin Forest Park (p733), Gwydyr Forest Park (p727) and Beddgelert Forest Park (p726). See www.mbwales.com and www.cycling.visitwales.com for more information. Permits are required.

Following two alternative routes through the park, the Lôn Las Cymru (see the boxed text, p651) route offers stunning, if hilly, road cycling.

For safety and environmental reasons, a voluntary daytime ban operates on Mt Snowdon on three (otherwise legal) bridleways, from 10am to 5pm daily May to September.

SnowBikers (☎ 01341-430628; www.snowbikers.com) and **Bicycle Beano** (☎ 01982-560471; www.bicycle-beano.co.uk) lead guided tours in and around Snowdonia National Park. Trips are irregular, so book well in advance.

To escape the roads and leave the traffic behind, scenic former railway lines can be found in the sea-level **Mawddach Trail**, near Dolgellau, and at **Caernarfon** in the north.

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

Tranquilly located at Waunfawr, south of Caernarfon, **Snowdonia Riding Stables** (☎ 01286-650342; www.snowdonia2000.fsnet.co.uk; per hr £15, half-day £33) can take you deep into the mountains. See also the Dolbadarn Pony Trekking Centre (p724) at Llanberis.

VINTAGE RAILWAYS

Several vintage, narrow-gauge steam railways ply routes through Snowdonia's breathtaking former mining heartlands (see the boxed text, p729).

WALKING

Mt Snowdon is the main destination for walkers, many basing themselves at Llanberis to tackle one of the numerous routes to the top (see the boxed text, p725).

But other hikes around the region are just as exhilarating, and less crowded. In the north (just northeast of Snowdon itself), try the rugged Glyders and the famous ridge of Tryfan, or the domed summits of the Carneddau range (northeast of the Glyders). To the south the Moelwyns and Moel Hebog, or the Nantlle Ridge, are good options. For gentler forest trails and river walks head for Betws-y-Coed.

Further south, the well-used ascent of Cader Idris (near Dolgellau) makes a fine day's walk. Here are also the Arans (northeast of Dolgellau, southwest of Bala), the lesser-known Arenigs (west of Bala) and the challenging Rhinog Ridge (east of Harlech).

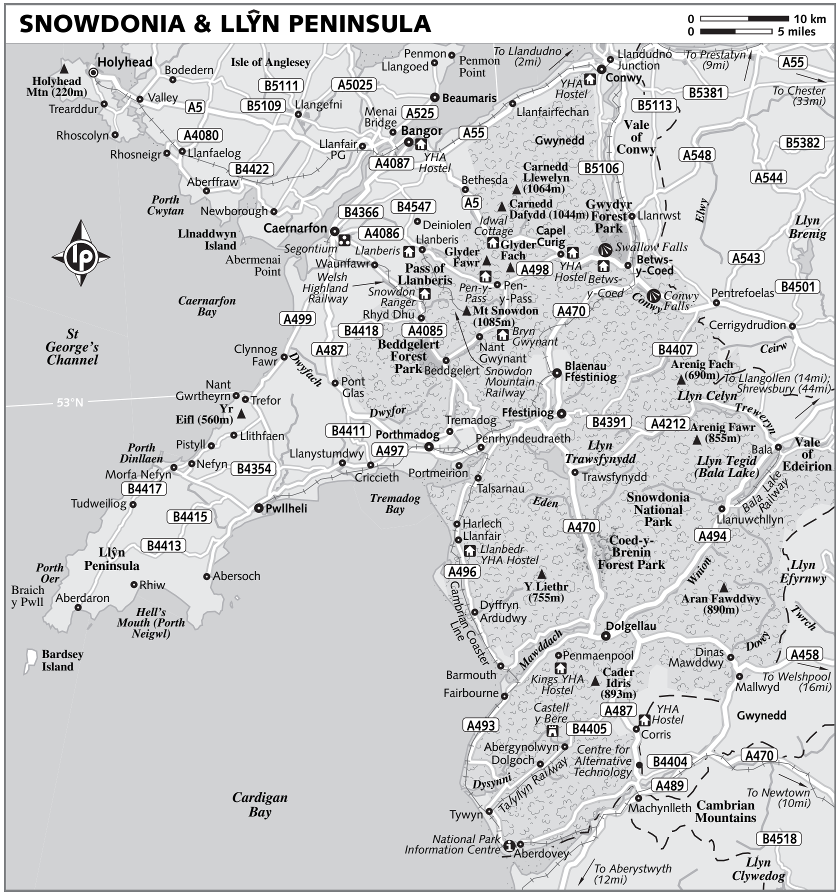
Local tourist offices stock brochures on the main mountain routes, as well as maps and detailed local guidebooks.

Before setting out, consider the following. Some walks graded 'easy' may still go near steep slopes or tricky terrain. Accidents can happen, usually on the way down. On average there are 70 serious incidents (and 10 deaths) annually in the park. Be prepared to deal with hostile weather at any time of year, even on days that seem clear and sunny. On anything more than a stroll, you should carry warm waterproof clothing, food and drink, map and compass. It's also worth checking the weather at a tourist office or on ☎ 09068 500449.

If in doubt about your abilities, consider a national park guided walk; ask at tourist offices or see the *Eryri/Snowdonia* newspaper.

Prestatyn, on the north coast, is the end of **Offa's Dyke Path**, a long-distance national trail along the Wales–England border. The route's final three days, from Chirk Castle via Llandegla and Bodfari, showcase the varied scenery of this northwestern corner of the region.

If the weather is bad in Snowdonia, try heading for the coast. The **Llŷn Peninsula** and **Isle of Anglesey** may have sunshine while the high peaks brood under cloud or rain.


SNOWDONIA & LLŶN PENINSULA

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Holyhead
Holyhead Mtn (220m)
Bodedern
Isle of Anglesey
Valley
Trearddur
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B5111
B5109
A5025
Llangefni
Rhoscolyn
A4080
Rhosneigr
Llanfaelog
B4422
Aberffraw
Porth Cwytan
Newborough
Llanfair PG
Menai Bridge
A525
Bangor
A55
A4087
YHA Hostel
Beaumaris
Penmon
Llangoed
Penmon Point
To Llandudno (2mi)
Llandudno Junction
To Prestatyn (9mi)
YHA Hostel
Conwy
Llanfairfechan
B5113
Vale of Conwy
B5381
To Chester (33mi)
A55
B5382
A548
A544
Gwynedd
Carnedd Llewelyn (1064m)
Bethesda
B5106
Carnedd Dafydd (1044m)
Gwydyr Forest Park
Llanrwst
Elwy
Llyn Brenig
B4366
B4547
A5
Deiniolen
Idwal Cottage
Capel Curig
Llinaddwyn Island
Caernarfon
A4086
Llanberis
Glyder Fach
Glyder Fawr
Swallow Falls
Betws-y-Coed
A543
Segontium
Abermenai Point
Waunfawr
Llanberis
Pass of Llanberis
A498
YHA Hostel
Welsh Highland Railway
Snowdon Ranger
Pen-y-Pass
Pen-y-Pass
Conwy Falls
Pentrefoelas
B4501
Caernarfon Bay
A499
Rhyd Ddu
Mt Snowdon (1085m)
A470
Cerrigydrudion
St George's Channel
B4418
A4085
Bryn Gwynant
Ceirw
Clynnog Fawr
A487
Beddgelert Forest Park
Nant Gwynant
B4407
Dwyfach
Beddgelert
Snowdon Mountain Railway
Blaenau Ffestiniog
Arenig Fach (690m)
To Llangollen (14mi); Shrewsbury (44mi)
Nant Gwrtheyrn
Pont Glas
53°N
Trefor
Llyn Celyn
Yr Eifl (560m)
Dwyfor
Ffestiniog
Tryweryn
Llithfaen
Tremadog
B4391
A4212
Arenig Fawr (855m)
Porth Dinllaen
Pistyll
B4411
Porthmadog
Penrhyndeudraeth
Llyn Trawsfynydd
Vale of Edeirion
Nefyn
Llanystumdwy
A497
Bala
B4354
Criccieth
Portmeirion
Trawsfynydd
Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake)
Morfa Nefyn
B4417
Talsarnau
Bala Lake Railway
Tudweiliog
Tremadog Bay
Eden
Snowdonia National Park
B4415
Pwllheli
Harlech
Llanuwchllyn
Llanfair
A470
Llyn Peninsula
B4413
Llanbedr YHA Hostel
Coed-y-Brenin Forest Park
A494
Porth Oer
A496
Llyn Efyrnwy
Abersoch
Y Liethr (755m)
Wnion
Braich y Pwll
Aberdaron
Rhiw
Cambrian Coaster Line
Dyffryn Ardudwy
Aran Fawddwy (890m)
Hell's Mouth (Porth Neigwl)
Twrch
Dolgellau
Bardsey Island
Mawddach
Penmaenpool
Dinas Mawddwy
Dovey
A458
Barmouth
Kings YHA Hostel
Cader Idris (893m)
To Welshpool (16mi)
Fairbourne
Mallwyd
Castell y Bere
A487
YHA Hostel
Gwynedd
A493
B4405
Corris
Abergynolwyn
Dolgoch
Centre for Alternative Technology
B4404
A470
Cardigan Bay
Dysynni
Talyllyn Railway
A489
To Newtown (10mi)
Tywyn
Machynlleth
Cambrian Mountains
National Park Information Centre
Aberdovey
B4518
To Aberystwyth (12mi)
Llyn Clywedog

Sleeping

There are some smart options in Snowdonia, but friendly hostels, B&Bs and midrange guesthouses are the norm.

Betws-y-Coed, Llanberis and Dolgellau have the greatest options, but some of the best are more isolated. There's a strong hostel network (both YHA and independent): see town entries for Bala, Bangor, Beddgelert, Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig, Caernarfon, Dolgellau, Harlech, Llanberis and Porthmadog.

Five YHA hostels serve Mt Snowdon:

Bryn Gwynant (p726; ☎ 0870 770 5732; bryngwynant@yha.org.uk)

Idwal Cottage (☎ 0870 770 5874; idwal@yha.org.uk)

Llanberis (p724; ☎ 0870 770 5928; llanberis@yha.org.uk)

Pen-y-Pass (☎ 0870 770 5990; penypass@yha.org.uk)

Snowdon Ranger (p726; ☎ 0870 770 6038; snowdon@yha.org.uk)

Getting There & Around

For information on Snowdonia buses, trains and multiday tickets, see p716.

Bus services between regional towns are adequate (but limited on Sunday). Colourful **Snowdon Sherpa** (☎ 01286-870880) buses serve the mountain areas and Mt Snowdon trailheads, with a network that includes Beddgelert, Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig, Llanberis, Pen-y-Pass and the surrounding towns of Bethesda, Caernarfon, Llandudno, Llanrwst and Porthmadog. Buses run every hour or two (fewer on Sunday), typically from about April to September, including an open-top bike-carrying service.

For more information, contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk) or visit a tourist office.

LLANBERIS

☎ 01286 / pop 1842

Llanberis has evolved to become Mt Snowdon's base town, but remove the outdoor pursuits and this is a fairly dull place. Built to house workers for the nearby Dinorwig slate quarry, its industrial heritage makes it far from the prettiest town in the national park.

Despite this, a steady flow of rugged fleece-wearers maintains a jovial mood throughout the year, tossed together with an assortment of day-trippers eager to ride the Snowdon Mountain Railway. In summer Llanberis heaves, and a gentle walk around the town's lakes, Llyn Padarn and Llyn Peris, will be blessed relief from the crowds.

Nearby are two worthwhile sights: the Welsh Slate Museum and Electric Mountain, where you can take a guided tour to the bowels of an underground hydroelectric power station.

TOP FIVE VIEWS

- Across Tremadog Bay from Criccieth Castle (p743)
- Walking Mt Snowdon's Devil's Punchbowl (p725)
- Riding the Ffestiniog Railway (p730)
- The Snowdonia range from Beaumaris (p742)
- Craggy sections of the A5 from Bethesda to Capel Curig (p726)

Orientation & Information

Llanberis is bypassed by the busy A4086, separating the village from the lakes. Nearly all the midrange accommodation and eateries are on High St. The **tourist office** (☎ 870765; llanberis.touristoffice@gwynedd.gov.uk; High St; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Wed & Fri-Sun Nov-Easter) is opposite the post office.

Sights

The old, young, infirm and plain lazy have been riding Britain's only public rack-and-pinion railway, **Snowdon Mountain Railway** (☎ 0870 458 0033; www.snowdonrailway.co.uk; one way/return adult £14/21, child £11/14; 🕑 departures up to half-hourly 9am-5pm Easter-Oct) to the summit of Mt Snowdon since 1896. The 5-mile journey climbs 900m and takes an hour. Schedules are weather-dependent and summertime queues can be long, but 9am departures can be booked half-price (by telephone, one day in advance).

Deep inside Elidir Mountain lurks an ingenious secret that helps Britain fire on all cylinders. **Electric Mountain** (☎ 870636; www.fhc.co.uk/electric_mountain.htm; tour £7; 🕑 10.30am-4.30pm

Wed-Sun Feb-Mar & Nov-Dec, daily Apr-May & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Jun-Aug) is the sparky name for this extraordinary rapid-response, pumped-storage Dinorwig power station. In times of surplus energy, water is pumped 600m up from Llyn Peris to the Marchlyn reservoir, where it sits until enough people switch on the kettle and – whoosh, instant electricity. Essential – after all, where would the Brits be without a cuppa? The good-value tour reveals all.

Good slate is a treasured commodity, both for roofing and ornamental decoration, and over the years tons of it came from around Llanberis. At the **Welsh Slate Museum** (☎ 870630; www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/slate; admission free; 🕘 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Sun-Fri Nov-Easter) in the huge Dinorwig quarry, you can visit old workshops where craftsmen split and dress the slate – it's harder than it looks.

The **Llanberis Lake Steam Railway** (☎ 870549; www.lake-railway.co.uk; return trip £6; 🕘 11am-4pm Jul-Aug, most days Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct) chuffs calmly along Llyn Padarn to Llanberis and back. The 5-mile return trip takes one hour.

Activities

The Llanberis area has numerous adventure possibilities. **High Trek Snowdonia** (☎ 871232; www.hightrek.co.uk), **Boulder Adventures** (☎ 870556; www.boulderadventures.com; Bryn Du Mountain Centre), **Padarn Watersports Centre** (☎ 870556; Llyn Padarn) and **Surf-Lines** (☎ 879001; www.surf-lines.co.uk) all offer a mixture of high-adrenaline pursuits such as mountaineering, kayaking, scrambling and coasteering.

Dolbadarn Pony Trekking Centre (☎ 870277; www.dolbadarnhotel.co.uk), operating from Dolbadarn Hotel, offers sedate excursions on horseback (half-hour taster £7.50, one hour £15, two hours £25, half-day £35, full day £55).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Cae Gwyn Farm (☎ 870718; Nant Peris; camp site per person £5) Opposite the Vaynol Arms in Nant Peris, 2 miles southeast of Llanberis, this site has basic facilities and the owner never turns anyone away.

Snowdon House (☎ 870284; 3 Gwastadnant, Nant Peris; tent sites per person £5, dm £10) Enjoy the luxury of heated bunk rooms a mere stone's throw from great routes to the Glyders and Tryfan.

Boulder Adventures (☎ 870556; www.boulderadventures.com; Ty Du Rd; dm £12, incl breakfast £14; ♿) At the Bryn Du Mountain Centre, off High St. Dorms here have good facilities to complement the comprehensive programme of outdoor pursuitsm.

Pete's Eats (☎ 870117; www.petes-eats.co.uk; 40 High St; dm/2-bed r/flat £12/30/140) Above the superb café of the same name (see below), Pete's has plain but comfy dorms and two private rooms. The recently opened top-floor flat sleeps 12 and can be booked by the night for self-catering groups.

Llanberis YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5928; llanberis@yha.org.uk; dm £13.95; 🕘 Easter-Oct with 48hr notice, Nov-Mar by arrangement) Behind the Spar supermarket on High St, this favourite has a top location for a quick ascent of Mt Snowdon. Four en suite doubles (from £32) are available.

Heights Hotel (☎ 871179; www.heightshotel.co.uk; 74 High St; s/d/tr/q £30/45/60/80) More hostel than hotel; the beer flows at the Heights while you shoot pool, scoff hearty meals or listen to live music. All rooms have en suite and are great value for larger groups.

MIDRANGE

Plas Coch Guest House (☎ 872122; www.plas-coch.co.uk; High St; d incl breakfast from £50) Opposite the Heights Hotel, Plas Goch has well-presented en suite rooms and a friendly welcome, with a hearty breakfast including Manx kippers and vegan options. No credit cards.

Dol Peris Hotel (☎ 870350; www.dolperis.com; High St; s/d from £28/50) Spacious and airy rooms with big mountain views in this Grade II–listed building that has a contemporary lounge and a burgeoning restaurant (see opposite).

Pen-y-Gwryd (☎ 870211; www.pyg.co.uk; s/d £34/68, without bathroom £28/56) Seven miles southeast of Llanberis, this cosy hotel is a little eccentric (breakfast and dinner are announced with a large gong) but full of atmosphere (look for the signatures of Britain's 1953 Everest climbers on the bar ceiling), although service can be abrupt at times.

Eating

Pete's Eats (☎ 870117; www.petes-eats.co.uk; 40 High St; mains £2.30-10; 🕘 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter; 💻) You can't miss Pete's garish exterior. It's still the hiker's fave, often full to the brim at the end of a long day in the mountains. Its gut-busting Big Jim is an institution, as are the legendary pints of tea, but there are good healthy options as well. Peter's also offers accommodation (see opposite).

SUMMIT SPECIAL

No Snowdonia experience is complete without tackling one of the region's awe-inspiring mountains. At 1085m, Mt Snowdon is the biggest and also the busiest, thanks in no small part to the Snowdon Mountain Railway (p723). But that would be cheating, so leave the train to grandma and let's get those boots on.

Six paths of varying length and difficulty lead to the summit. Simplest (and dullest) is the **Llanberis Path** (8 miles, six hours), running beside the railway track. The **Snowdon Ranger Path** (7 miles, five hours) starts at the Snowdon Ranger YHA hostel near Beddgelert; this is the shortest and also the safest in winter.

Two options start at Pen-y-Pass (and involve the least amount of ascent): the **Miners Track** (8 miles, six hours) starts gently and ends with a steep section; the **Pyg Track** (8 miles, six hours) is more interesting, and meets the Miners Track where it steepens. The classic **Snowdon Horseshoe** route (7.5 miles, 5½ hours) combines the Pyg Track to the summit (or via the precipitous ridge of Crib Goch if you're very experienced) with a descent route over the peak of Llewedd and a final section down on the Miners Track.

The straightforward **Rhyd Ddu Path** (8 miles, six hours) approaches from the west. Most challenging is the **Watkin Path** (8 miles, six hours), involving an ascent of more than 1000m on its southerly approach from Nantgwynant.

At the summit you should find work under way on a shiny new visitor centre, replacing the old bunker-like café that prompted Prince Charles to label the summit 'the highest slum in Europe'. Building of the centre has been dogged by setbacks; scandal erupted with the announcement that the roof would be made from Portuguese granite instead of local materials.

Variations on these walks are in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Britain*. Snowdon Sherpa buses (see p723) stop at the trailheads, and there are also options for accommodation near them all. If you want a little more solitude, get an early start for the **Glyders**, starting from Idwal Cottage YHA, or head further south for **Cader Idris**.

Vaynol Arms (☎ 870284; Nant Peris; mains £6.40-12) Opposite Cae Gwyn Farm camp site in Nant Peris, the Vaynol is the best pub in the area, serving traditional pub meals (steak, gammon, scampi) and real ale to wash it all down.

Dol Peris Hotel (☎ 870350; High St; mains £9-11; 🕘 6-9pm Wed-Sun) Reasonably priced meals in a cosy atmosphere make Dol Peris a good midrange option. Try homemade steak-and-Guinness pie or join in a bargain-priced, themed Mexican night.

Y Bistro (☎ 871278; 45 High St; mains £14-17.50; 🕘 dinner Tue-Sat) Twenty years of fine cuisine mean reservations are recommended at this, the finest restaurant for miles. Creative Gallic flair meets local Welsh ingredients – how about a lone pigeon or lamb's liver served with abundant garlic and a potato rosti?

For self-caterers, there's a large, modern Spar supermarket on High St.

Getting There & Away

Llanberis is 13 miles from Bangor; catch bus 85 (45 minutes, 19 services daily Monday to Saturday, seven services on Sunday). Bus 88 runs to Caernarfon (25 minutes, hourly); some services continue to Nant Peris. Service 96A goes to Nant Peris (10 minutes) and Pen-y-Pass (20 minutes) from Monday to Friday (hourly). The Snowdon Sherpa bus S1 to the Snowdon trailhead at Pen-y-Pass departs mostly hourly, including Sunday.

BEDDGELERT

☎ **01766**

At the heart of the mountains, but with less bare rock and more greenery than neighbouring villages, Beddgelert makes a pleasant base from which to explore. Verdant hills above the River Gwynant are reminiscent of a Scottish glen, especially during summer when purple heather blazes all around. In the tiny streets below, a mainly elderly crowd enjoys a clutch of tearooms and craft shops. Visitors here are often perched on the wall outside the ice cream shop – join them for one (or more) of 23 lip-smacking homemade flavours.

The town's name, meaning 'Gelert's Grave', refers to the well-known Welsh legend of Prince Llywelyn's faithful dog. Believing the dog had savaged his baby son, Llywelyn slaughtered the dog, only later to discover that Gelert fought off a wolf that had attacked the baby. More likely, the true name is derived from a 5th-century Irish preacher, Celert, who is believed to have founded a church here. Gelert's Grave can be found by following the river downstream.

The **National Park Information Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 890615; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct) is on the road heading south.

Sights & Activities

First mined in Roman times, **Sygun Copper Mine** (☎ 510100; www.sygun-coppermine.co.uk; adult/child £7.95/5.95; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm 26 Dec-1 Jan) is 1 mile east of the village and is recommended for families; pan for gold and see the mine's impressive stalactites and stalagmites.

A popular **walk** follows the old Welsh Highland Railway down the Pass of Aberglaslyn – exercise caution when the river is high. The railway is under restoration (p730), but controversy has raged over the potential impact on the fragile environment and disruption to village life. Mountain-bike trails for all levels are at **Beddgelert Forest**, 2 miles north on the A4085. **Beics Beddgelert** (☎ 890434; bikes per half-/full day £14/18) rents mountain bikes and supplies route information.

Sleeping & Eating

Cwellyn Arms (Rhyd Dhu; ☎ 890321; www.snowdoninn.co.uk; sites per tent £5-7, dm £10-15, s/d from £50/60) Ideally placed for an assault on Snowdon, this pub offers standard en suite rooms, decent dorms and camp sites. Hearty grub fuels the climbers and splendid ales quench the thirst.

Plas Colwyn (☎ 890458; s/d from £20/40; 🚭) Rooms at Plas Colwyn are comfortable if somewhat drab, with patterned wallpaper and carpets. Meals can be arranged, including vegetarian options.

Beddgelert Tearooms & Bistro (☎ 890543; mains £11.50-20; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Cosy and cluttered with antiques, this is the place for afternoon tea or sophisticated dinner (shark steaks or fresh Anglesey lobster). Upstairs, bedrooms offer comfortable, although chintzy, accommodation (singles/doubles £25/42); some have exposed stone walls.

Two YHA hostels and one great camp site serve Snowdon summiteers:

Beddgelert Forest Campsite (☎ 890288; 2-person tent sites £7.50-12.70) Calm and leafy, this award-winning Forestry Commission site lies a mile north of town on the Caernarfon road and has good facilities and a shop.

Bryn Gwynant YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5732; bryngwynant@yha.org.uk; dm £12) Stunning location overlooking Llyn Gwynant, near the steep Watkin Path, 4 miles east on the A498.

Snowdon Ranger YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 6038; snowdon@yha.org.uk; dm £12) Well positioned for the Snowdon Ranger Path, 5 miles north on the A4085.

Although both hostels are open year-round, check in advance if you're travelling out of peak season, and make reservations in summer.

Getting There & Away

Snowdon Sherpa bus S4 runs to Caernarfon (30 minutes) and Pen-y-Pass (20 minutes), every two hours Monday to Saturday (fewer on Sunday). Bus S97 runs to Porthmadog (20 minutes), Capel Curig and Betws-y-Coed, every two hours (three on Sunday).

CAPEL CURIG

☎ 01690

Blink and you'll miss cute Capel Curig, one of the park's oldest resorts and ringed by dramatic scenery. Battered boots and rugged looks are *de rigueur* thanks to **Plas y Brenin – the National Mountain Centre** (☎ 720214; www.pyb.co.uk; B&B per person £20), a great facility for learning skills from alpine climbing to leadership courses – including introductory sessions. There's also a bar, climbing wall and dry ski slope, although not for use in that order. Last-minute accommodation can be booked (up to two days in advance), but only if the centre hasn't filled all the beds with activity groups.

Dolgam Campsite (☎ 720228; sites per person £4) is a large farm site with a pleasant riverside location but basic facilities. With imposing Snowdon views, **Capel Curig YHA hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5746; capelcurig@yha.org.uk; dm £16; 🕒 Easter-Oct, Nov-Mar by advance booking) is the archetypal hiker's base.

our pick **St Curig's Church** (☎ 720469; www.stcurigschurch.com; dm £15, dm incl breakfast £20, s/d £37.50/65), a beautiful converted church, is Capel Curig's most stunning residence. Shoot pool under the ornate dome of the apse, chill on the comfy sofas or soak in the outdoor hot-tub. The contemporary mezzanine kitchen is wonderful, and en suite rooms with hand-carved four-poster beds promise a luxurious night for weary walkers.

Although looking a little tired, **Bryn Tyrch Hotel** (☎ 720223; lunches £3.80-7, dinner mains £9-10.50) remains Capel's best dinner option, and has decent rooms (singles/doubles £45/65, without bathroom £40/56). The contemporary menu features treats such as salmon fillet with fennel marmalade.

Bryn Tyrch is also a favourite boozer for hikers and climbers, along with the Plas y Brenin centre and the Mountain Bar at **Cobdens Hotel** (☎ 720243; B&B per person Mon-Thu £29.50, Fri-Sun £35.50), which is built into the rock face.

Snowdon Sherpa S2 and S97 services stop here en route between Llandudno (1½ hours, half-hourly, fewer on Sunday) and Llanberis (25 minutes), also calling at Betws-y-Coed and Pen-y-Pass. Snowdon Sherpa S6 to Bangor (40 minutes) runs three times a day (one on Sunday).

If you have a car, drive the A5 to Bethesda for raking, rocky views.

BETWS-Y-COED

☎ 01690 / pop 2034

Betws-y-Coed (betoos-y-*koyd*), self-styled eastern gateway to Snowdonia National Park, is a pretty village beside the babbling Rivers Conwy and Llugwy that gets awkwardly crowded during summer. Meaning 'chapel in the wood', the name is usually shortened to Betws.

Lying 12 miles northeast of Mt Snowdon, this is the first major walking hub that you reach if you're travelling from northern England. With transport you can easily strike out for the big peaks; otherwise, enjoy the tranquil riverside paths and mountain-bike trails in the surrounding woodland, or just chill in a café.

Orientation & Information

The village stretches along narrow Holyhead Rd, with all amenities on or just off it. The **National Park Information Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 710426; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Easter) is in the Royal Oak Stables near the train station.

Activities

There are numerous forest **walks** close to Betws. Northwest is **Gwydyr Forest**, 28 sq miles of oak, beech, larch and fir crisscrossed with paths, and a great venue for walking, **mountain biking** or **pony trekking**. The *Gwydyr Forest Guide* costs £2 and *Walks around Betws-y-Coed* £4.95 – both from the tourist office.

Beics Betws (☎ 710766; www.beicsbetws.co.uk; bikes per half-/full day £14/18) provides bikes and route information – bookings are advised. Find it up the steep lane behind the post office.

At **Ty Coch Farm** (☎ 760248; www.horse-riding-wales.co.uk; Penmachno; per hr £17, full day £48), in the village of Penmachno, 6 miles south of Betws, you can ride by the hour or for a full day. There's also a popular to-the-pub-and-back route (around four hours, £36).

Pretty **Swallow Falls** (adult/child £1/50p) is 2 miles west, by the A5, and is reachable by a scenic riverside path starting at Pont-y-Pair bridge. **Conwy Falls** (adult £1) is 2 miles south off the A5, with a quaint café.

Of course, you could just join day-trippers for a **picnic** on the boulders of the gushing River Llugwy at the midtown Pont-y-Pair bridge.

Sleeping

Seemingly every other house in Betws is a B&B or hotel, but it still gets hectic around holiday times. Try to get away from the main street, the busy A5.

Riverside Camping & Caravan Site (☎ 710310; Old Church Rd; tent sites per person £5.50; no pitching after 9.30pm) Scenic, peaceful riverside site with great facilities that fills up in summer, but only accepts singles and couples. Cross the train track at the station or follow the road to the golf club from Holyhead Rd.

Betws-y-Coed YHA hostel (☎ 710796; betwsycoed@yha.co.uk; dm £14) Unspectacular but functional hostel, 2 miles west of Betws on the A5. You'll be isolated here, so self-cater or eat moderately at the adjacent Swallow Falls Hotel bar.

Church Hill House (☎ 710447; www.church-hill-house.co.uk; Vicarage Rd; s/d £27.50/55) Overlooking St Mary's Church, this peaceful place is reminiscent of a trip to grandma's – all floral carpets and Anaglypta wallpaper. Rooms are basic but spotless and the family cat welcomes all-comers. Budding pianists can plonk away in the lounge to the unusual audience of a stuffed salmon and a Scottish buck's head.

Dolgethin Guesthouse (☎ 710241; s/d from £28/40; 🚭) An Israeli hostess is the last thing you expect in rural Wales, but that's what you get at this friendly place, the last house on the left as you head west from the village. Furnishings are old but comfortable.

Bryn Afon (☎ 710403; www.bryn-afon.co.uk; s/d £40/54; 🚭) Cross the Pont-y-Pair bridge and go right for this breezy place, where walkers and cyclists are welcome to share the soft, smartly designed rooms and superb river views.

Henllys – The Old Courthouse (☎ 710534; www.guesthouse-snowdonia.co.uk; Old Church Rd; d £60-80) Ever spent a night behind bars? Actually, don't answer that. Instead, take the details of this converted 1867 courthouse and police station with original features such as a solid door with a little sliding window, as well as a collection of international police helmets. Bedrooms have themed names such as 'Fingerprint' and 'Swag', but please, no jokes about the 'Handcuff' room.

Acorns (☎ 710395; www.betws-y-coed-breaks.co.uk; d £60-90; ⊠) Near the centre of the village, this stylish, open-plan suite has modern décor and luxuries such as DVD player and huge power shower. More elegant than most around here – don't get muddy boots on the carpet!

Eating

Betws is heavily weighted to accommodation, but eating options have improved.

Alpine Coffee Shop (☎ 710747; Old Station Bldgs; mains £5-7.50; 🕑 Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm, Sat & Sun 8am-5.30pm) Longtime institution with great all-day breakfasts, snacks and vegan meals. There's also a comprehensive tea menu featuring Jun Shan Silver Needles, the most expensive tea in the world, at £8.50 per pot!

Ty Gwyn Hotel (☎ 710383; Holyhead Rd; mains £6.50-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Tuck into extra-tasty morsels such as marinated Thai steak in this atmospheric coaching inn overlooking Waterloo Bridge.

Cross Keys (☎ 710334; Holyhead Rd; mains £6.75-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Tasty pub-style food (gammon, steak, curry) and desserts, served in a cosy bar at the west end of the village.

Royal Oak Hotel (☎ 710219; Holyhead Rd; mains £8-18.50 🕑 lunch & dinner) This place takes strange pride in the fact that Sir Cliff Richard once ate here. Bar meals include slow-grilled Welsh lake trout, while the restaurant serves the most expensive dishes in town – try pumpkin-and-cumin risotto.

Bistro Betws-y-Coed (☎ 710328; Holyhead Rd; mains £13-16; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Locally sourced fish and meat, and veggie options, are dished up in a cottagey dining room with chunky wooden tables.

Self-caterers should head to the small **Spar supermarket** (☎ 710324, Holyhead Rd; 🕑 8am-10pm).

Getting There & Away

Betws lies halfway along the scenic Conwy Valley railway line between Llandudno (40 minutes) and Blaenau Ffestiniog (30 minutes), with eight services daily (three on Sunday).

Buses 19 and X19 run to Llandudno (one hour, nine daily, one on Sunday), the 97A serves Porthmadog (65 minutes, four daily, two on Sunday) via Beddgelert and 84 connects Betws to Blaenau Ffestiniog (20 minutes, two daily, none on Sunday).

Snowdon Sherpa bus S2 shuttles regularly between Betws and Capel Curig, Pen-y-Pass and Llanberis.

BLAENAU FFESTINIOG

☎ 01766 / pop 3961

Dwarfed by immense peaks of slate-mine slag waste, Blaenau (blay-nye) Ffestiniog is the town Snowdonia forgot – when the national park was established an exclusion zone was created around Blaenau and its pariah status was assured.

The mountains of slag exist because for every ton of usable slate that was mined, nine tons of rubble were produced. While much of Britain benefited with shiny new roofs, Blaenau still carries the burden of its industrial past and today the town feels trapped and forlorn.

But despite the scars, it could be worse – the surroundings are magnificent and the air is clean. Most visitors come for the Ffestiniog Railway (p730), which once carried the slate to the seaport at Porthmadog, and Llechwedd Slate Caverns, where the immense scale of the mining history is revealed.

The **National Park Information Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 830360; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct) is a friendly place with a range of books and maps.

Sights

Llechwedd Slate Caverns (☎ 830306; www.llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk; 1 ride/both rides adult £8.95/£13.50, child £6.75/9.50; 🕑 10am-5.15pm Mar-Sep, 10am-4.15pm Oct-Feb) offers two tours inside the 1846 mine tunnels: the 25-minute Deep Mine tour, including a descent on the UK's steepest passenger railway (1:1.8, or 1.8m across for every metre up or down), and the Miner's Tramway tour, which better suits claustrophobics. The mine is 1 mile north of Blaenau on the A470.

Sleeping & Eating

our pick **Bryn Elltid Guest House** (☎ 831356; www.accommodation-snowdonia.com; Tanygrisiau; s/d £27/44.50) Just outside Blaenau, on the shores of Llyn Ystradau, this place is a Snowdonia gem – a wonder of ecofriendly self-sustainability with solar collectors, wood-burning stoves and imaginative wooden extensions added to the original stone cottage. The ace in the pack is the 'Hobbit House', a wool-insulated, turf-roofed outbuilding-cum-guest-bedroom. Top it off with a wonderful organic meal (four-course dinners £18) using garden-fresh ingredients.

Cae Du (☎ 830847; www.caedu.co.uk; s/d £35/50) Another hiker's favourite due to its close proximity to first-rate paths, Cae Du stands in beautiful gardens. The isolation and views are immense, and the welcome is friendly. Three-course dinners cost £14. Cae Du is 1.5 miles south, signed off the A470 Ffestiniog road.

Queens Hotel (☎ 830055; www.queens-snowdonia.co.uk; Church St; mains £7-14) Bar and restaurant meals and 12 tidy, old-style bedrooms (singles/doubles from £45/60), named after steam trains from the Ffestiniog Railway.

Opposite the train station, the **Co-op supermarket** (🕑 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, Sun 10am-4pm) is best for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Bus 1 to Bangor (1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday) runs via Porthmadog, Criccieth and Caernarfon. Bus 35 serves Dolgellau (50 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday) and the T4 serves Llandudno (75 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday), via Betws-y-Coed.

The narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway from Porthmadog terminates at Blaenau, although the bus takes half the time. Regular trains to Llandudno (£5.50, 65 minutes, at least six daily, three on Sunday in summer, fill-in bus in winter) go via Betws-y-Coed.

PORTHMADOG

☎ 01766 / pop 3008

Porthmadog is the type of place where it's better to travel than arrive. It's located at the mouth of the Glaslyn Estuary, where the Llŷn Peninsula juts westward, and most visitors approach through mountainous splendour. Whether by road or the scenic Ffestiniog Railway, the journey enthrals and 'Port' itself is a disappointment. For many its major attraction is either as a transport hub or place to stock up on provisions.

The town grew around the 19th-century harbour built by William Alexander Madocks to handle slate from the mountain mines, much from Blaenau Ffestiniog. The link with Blaenau is still the main draw today, as people flock to ride the vintage steam train along its 13.5-mile route. The track crosses the estuary via the **Cob**, a mile-long causeway that affords fine views to the Moelwyn mountain range.

At the end of the Cob is the **tourist office** (☎ 512981; porthmadog.touristoffice@gwynedd.gov.uk; High St; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm), which backs onto the harbour – a pleasant place to stroll or take coffee and cake. Free internet access is available at the **library** (☎ 514091; Chapel St; 🕑 10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Wed, 10am-noon Thu & Sat).

The main **High Street** houses most shops and facilities, leading to Porthmadog's full-sized train station (Cambrian Coaster line) at the western end of town. Beach-bums love **Blackrock Sands**, 2 miles west and one of the region's most beautiful coastal stretches, while

STEAM RIDES AGAIN

Wales' narrow-gauge railways are testament to an industrial heyday of mining and quarrying. Using steam and diesel engines, they often crossed terrain that defied standard-gauge trains. The wonderful scenery they rattle through makes riding them truly worthwhile.

The advent of steam and the rapid spread of the railway transformed 19th-century Britain, but 20th-century industrial decline and road-building left many lines defunct. The infamous Beeching report of 1963 closed dozens of rural branch lines and five years later British Rail fired up its last steam engine.

Passionate steam enthusiasts formed a preservation group, buying and restoring old locomotives, rolling stock, disused lines and stations – a labour of love financed by offering rides, often with old railway workers helping out.

Nine restored lines around Wales form a group called **Great Little Trains of Wales** (☎ 01286-870549; www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk). The narrow-gauge Wanderer pass (£55) is valid for nine consecutive days on all lines.

to the east is the Italianate fantasy village of Portmeirion.

Ropewalks (☎ 515316; www.ropewalks.co.uk; per 2hr session £15) is a high-flying activity centre where you trapeze, swing or zip yourself in to an airborne frenzy. Find it at Greenacres Holiday Park, 2.5 miles along the road from High St, signposted Borth-y-Gest.

Ffestiniog Railway & Welsh Highland Railway

Built between 1832 and 1836, the narrow-gauge **Ffestiniog Railway** (☎ 516024; www.festrail.co.uk; halfway/full return trip £10/16.50) used to haul slate from the mines of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the sea at Porthmadog. Today, vintage 1860s engines and carriages puff tourists along the picturesque 13.5-mile line.

Trains run two to eight times daily from Easter to October, with limited off-season services. For a cheaper ticket (£12.50), depart on the first or last trains (booking is advisable).

At the western end of town (near the main-line station) is another piece of railway history. The **Welsh Highland Railway** (☎ 513402; www.whr.co.uk; return trip £4.95) used to run 22 miles northward through the mountains via the Pass of Aberglaslyn and Beddgelert to Caernarfon and is now under restoration. You can ride a short 1.75-mile section of the former track at this southern end of the line. More substantial is the northern section between Caernarfon and Rhyd Dhu (p740). Good-value discount tickets allowing return travel on all three lines cost £30.

Sleeping & Eating

Tyddyn Llwyn Hotel (☎ camping 512205, hotel 513903; www.hotel.tyddynllwyn.com; Morfa Bychan Rd; 2-person tent sites £10-13, s/d £35/60) Camp in scenic grounds a half-mile along Borth Rd in open countryside. Rooms are available, but were under refurbishment at the time of research. Call for latest details.

Snowdon Lodge (☎ 515354; www.snowdonlodge.co.uk; Church St; dm/d incl breakfast £14/35; 💻 ☒) This Tremadog house was the birthplace of Lawrence of Arabia in 1888, and is now a friendly independent hostel specialising in activity breaks. Dorms can be cramped but breakfast is good and there's a sociable bar. Find it 1 mile north of Porthmadog.

Tudor Lodge (☎ 515530; www.tudor-lodge.co.uk; Penamser Rd; s/d £35/55) Comfortable, friendly and good value en suite accommodation in the heart of town, near the roundabout on the A497 towards the west end of High St.

Yr Hen Fecws (☎ 514625; www.henfecws.com; 16 Lombard St; s/d from £42/55; ☒) Stylishly restored, this stone cottage remains one of the finest places to stay in town. The restaurant serves excellent bistro dishes (mains from £8) such as hot smoked salmon with fresh asparagus.

Passage to India (☎ 512144; www.tudor-lodge.co.uk; 26 Lombard St; mains £4.25-14; 🕒 6-11pm) Recommended and oft-busy place with deep red and yellow décor, serving an array of tasty subcontinental treats.

Try the Golden Fleece, 1 mile north in Tremadog, for local beer and stout pub grub.

Getting There & Away

Porthmadog is a hub for north Wales.

BUS

National Express (☎ 08705 808080) coach 545 runs daily to London (£27.50, 10 hours) via Bangor, Caernarfon, Llandudno, Chester and Birmingham. It stops near the police station on High St.

Bus 97 serves Betws-y-Coed (65 minutes, four daily, two on Sunday) via Beddgelert, Pen-y-Pass and Capel Curig. Bus 1 travels to Blaenau Ffestiniog (30 minutes) and Caernarfon (45 minutes) hourly, fewer on Sunday. Bus 3 runs to Pwllheli (35 minutes, every half-hour, six on Sunday). Bus X32 runs to Dolgellau (50 minutes, six daily, four on Sunday), Machynlleth (1½ hours) and Aberystwyth (£5, 2¼ hours), or Bangor (one hour).

TRAIN

Lying on the scenic Cambrian Coaster line, Porthmadog connects to Machynlleth (£8.60, 1¾ hours) and Pwllheli (20 minutes) every two or three hours (fewer on Sunday). For vintage trains to Blaenau Ffestiniog, see left.

AROUND PORTHMADOG

Portmeirion

Contrasting starkly with Snowdonia's natural beauty, **Portmeirion** (☎ 01766-770000; www.portmeirion-village.com; adult/child £6.50/3.50; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm) is a seaside fairy tale that testifies to the power of imagination. Welsh architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis spent the years 1925 to 1927 designing his Utopian masterpiece, resulting in a charming group of disparate Italianate buildings. Despite his quick work at the drawing board, it was 1975 before Williams-Ellis' vision was finally completed.

Williams-Ellis assembled remnants from ramshackle stately mansions and reassembled them in a hotchpotch of pastel shades and ornate flourishes on an isolated peninsula near his ancestral home. Gathered around a central plaza, with a backdrop of a beautiful, broad tidal estuary, the quirky architecture conjures an irresistible Mediterranean atmosphere.

Over the years Portmeirion has influenced novelists, film writers and the Beatles. Noel Coward wrote *Blithe Spirit* here, an episode of the BBC's *Dr Who* was based in the village and George Harrison chose it to host his 50th-birthday party. Most famously, Portmeirion was the set for the cult 1960s TV series *The Prisoner*, and the 'Prisoner Information Centre' remains.

Nobody lives here – it's purely a magical tourist draw that attracts huge summer crowds. Wonderful accommodation is available, but you'll need pockets as deep as Llechwedd Slate Caverns to experience it. **Hotel Portmeirion** (☎ 01766-770000; s £153-242, d £188-277) has classic, elegant rooms and a contemporary dining room designed by Sir Terence Conran. **Castell Deudraeth** (☎ 01766-772400; s £174-242, d £209-277) is a Victorian mansion with an informal grill and more modern rooms.

Portmeirion lies 1.75 miles east of Porthmadog across the Cob, then a mile south off the main road. Bus 99B runs directly to the village twice daily at 9.55am and 1.05pm (not Sunday). More buses, and Ffestiniog and Cambrian Railway trains, run to the village of Minffordd, from where it's a 1-mile walk.

HARLECH

☎ 01766

Of all north Wales' medieval fortifications, the sheer might and awe-inspiring position of Harlech Castle make it one of the most memorable, with sweeping views across Tremadog Bay and the brooding bulk of Mt Snowdon to the rear. Finished in 1289 by Edward I, Harlech is now a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Resolutely clinging to the hillside, Harlech itself is tiny but provides sophisticated accommodation, stylish dining and pleasant mooching around antique shops. Up and down the coast gorgeous beaches hug the shoreline, none better than Shell Island, accessible by causeway and a good place for kids to explore the rock pools.

There's a **National Park Information Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 780658; Gwyddfor House, High St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct) behind the castle. The train station lies below the town, meaning a steep 15-minute climb to the castle.

Harlech Castle

Despite its strategic location and hefty construction, the **castle** (Cadw; ☎ 780552; admission £3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) has been called the 'Castle of Lost Causes' because it fell so often during battle. It was captured by Owain Glyndŵr in 1404, but the future Henry V usurped him just four years later. During the Wars of the Roses the castle fell to the Yorkists (after an astonishing seven-year siege) in 1468, and fell again in 1647 when Cromwell's men took control during the Civil War.

The fortress's great natural defence is the seaward cliff face. When it was built, ships could sail supplies right to the base. The landward side is defended by the twin-towered **Great Gatehouse**, with three portcullises, arrow slits and murder-holes (portals for boiling fluids).

Early 15th-century events inspired one of Wales' most famous military marches, Men of Harlech. Regiments linked to Wales, such as the Royal Welsh (UK) and the Royal Canadian Hussars, have adopted the rousing anthem as their regimental march.

Sleeping & Eating

Llanbedr YHA hostel (Harlech YHA; ☎ 0870 770 5926; reservations@yha.org.uk; dm £12; 🕒 Easter-Oct) Close to the coast on the A496, 3 miles south of Harlech.

Cemlyn Restaurant & Tearoom (☎ 780425; High St; 2-/3-course dinners £21.50/23.50; ☒) Long-standing institution with classy dishes such as brochette of monkfish with pesto crust, or tasty afternoon tea with a view on the sunny deck. Upstairs, two bright rooms (singles/doubles from £45/60) offer simple accommodation. Room 1 has great castle views.

Castle Cottage (☎ 780479; www.castlecottageharlech.co.uk; s £65-95, d £90-120; ☒) Fine dining and five-star accommodation by the castle. Elegant rooms exude quality, with solid furniture, exposed beams and wonderful en suite bathrooms. Room 7 is a monster. Downstairs, the restaurant (three-course dinners £29) has wonders such as roast suckling pig and baked Conwy salmon – recommended for a splurge.

Getting There & Away

Bus 38 serves Barmouth (30 minutes, hourly, three on Sunday) and Blaenau Ffestiniog (30 minutes, 11 times daily, two on Sunday). Cambrian Coaster trains serve Machynlleth (£7.50, 1½ hours) and Porthmadog (20 minutes) about every two to three hours (three on Sunday).

BARMOUTH (ABERMAW)

☎01341 / pop 2251

Spectacular scenery blesses this part of Wales. Miles of golden beaches and the stunning Mawddach Estuary mean you're seldom far from mountain or sea. Unfortunately, Barmouth is something of a blot, a seaside resort in the worst British traditions – sunburnt beer-bellies, white socks and sandals, and bucket (and spade) loads of inflatable tat.

The **tourist office** (☎280787; barmouth.touristoffice@gwynedd.gov.uk; Station Rd; 🕑 Mar-Nov) is inside the train station.

Sights & Activities

Cross the mouth of the estuary on a wooden railway viaduct (with footpath) and walk or cycle the atmospheric Mawddach Trail (see opposite). Alternatively, climb the steep alleys to **Dinas Oleu** (265m) for outstanding cliff-top views.

Board a ferry to the sandy spit, Penrhyn Point, then ride the narrow-gauge **Fairbourne & Barmouth Steam Railway** (☎250362; www.fairbournerailway.com; ferry return trip £2.50, train £6.90; 🕑 Jun-Oct), which rattles 2 miles along the seafront to Fairbourne.

Sleeping & Eating

Sandpiper Guest House (☎280318; www.thesandpiperguesthouse.co.uk; 7 Marine Pde; s/d from £23/45; ☒ ♿) Flouncy rooms but homely enough, and offering rare wheelchair access.

Dros-y-Dwr (☎280284; www.barmouthbandb.co.uk; 6 Porkington Tce; s/d from £35/50; ☒) Spacious en suite rooms with pristine décor and big sea views mean this remains one of the better options in town.

Bistro (☎281009; Church St; mains £10-14.50), For top tucker, try Bistro's international menu of meat and fish, such as roast duck breast on walnut mash with plum and honey sauce.

Getting There & Away

Bus 38 serves Blaenau Ffestiniog (65 minutes, at least four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Harlech. Bus T5 runs to Porthmadog (50 minutes, seven daily, none on Sunday) or Machynlleth (55 minutes, eight daily, none on Sunday).

Cambrian Coaster trains run to Machynlleth (£5.80, 55 minutes) and Porthmadog (45 minutes) every two or three hours (three on Sunday).

TYWYN & AROUND

☎01654

Famous as the inspiration behind Reverend W Awdry's children's stories *Thomas the Tank Engine*, the cute steam-driven **Talyllyn Railway** (☎710472; return trip £11; 🕑 Easter-Oct) pootles 7 miles up the Fathew Valley to Abergynolwyn, where it once served slate quarries. The train passes five stations en route, where you can disembark for pleasant guided walks. Ticket stubs to full locos are exhibited at the **railway museum**, and there's a **tourist office** (☎710070; High St).

Three miles off the B4405 road from Tywyn, in the Dysynni Valley, the ramshackle remains of 13th-century **Castell y Bere** (Cadw; open site) are worth visiting. Built in 1222 by Llywelyn the Great, the castle was seized by the Normans but abandoned soon after. A short walk from here is the quaint 12th-century **St Michael's Church**. Note the leper's window, through which, in less salubrious times, sufferers could witness the sacraments.

DOLGELLAU

☎01341 / pop 2407

No-nonsense market towns are a Welsh speciality, and Dolgellau (doll-geth-lye) does the job better than most. Stout stone buildings topped with tons of prime slate are the setting for gruff local businesses to serve the outlying communities.

The town is a major outdoor-pursuits base. One of Snowdonia's premier peaks, bulky Cader Idris (893m), lies to the south, while nearby Coed-y-Brenin Forest Park provides glorious mountain biking. For a gentler stroll or bike ride, try the heralded Mawddach Estuary path to Barmouth.

Dolgellau's wealth came from the 19th-century wool trade, which provided most of the impressive buildings. More than 200 are listed for preservation, the highest concentration in Wales. Despite the town's industrial roots, recent years have seen a welcome twist of modern zest, with contemporary restaurants and stylish shops tempting locals and visitors alike.

The **National Park Information Centre & Tourist Office** (☎422888; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Sep, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Oct-Easter) is in the central square. Upstairs is a permanent exhibition (admission free) on the area's Quaker heritage, dating back to the 17th century.

Meaning 'mighty session', **Sesiwn Fawr Dolgellau** (☎0871-2301314; www.sesiwnfawr.com; per day/weekend £18/30), held in July, combines great music with top-notch ale. Although the festival is traditionally folk based, 2006 saw a set from Newport's comedy-rappers Goldie Lookin' Chain.

Activities

CYCLING

Eight miles north of Dolgellau, on the A470, is **Coed-y-Brenin Forest Park** (☎440666; www.mbwales.com), a premier mountain-biking destination. Signposted trails weave for 70 miles, with something for all abilities. There are bike rentals, a café and bike wash. Dolgellau lies on the Lôn Las Cymru (see the boxed text, p651) route, or for picturesque pedalling try the **Mawddach Trail**, a converted railway line meandering 7.5 miles along the south of the Mawddach Estuary to Barmouth. The trail starts in the car park beside the town bridge.

Hire mountain bikes at **MRX** (☎423008; Smithfield St; per day £15-20) and **Dolgellau Cycles** (☎423332; half-/full day £13/20).

WALKING

As well as the **Mawddach Trail**, the 2-mile **Torrent Walk** along a shaded ravine (once a private path for 'ladies and guests' of the Caerywch Estate) is worthwhile; head east along the A470 – the walk is signposted off the B4416 road to Brithdir.

The proximity of **Cader Idris** is a big draw, and the tourist office stocks route leaflets. The standard route is a six-mile, five-hour return hike up the 'Dolgellau' or Ty Nant Path (southeast from Ty Nant Farm on the A493). Longest and easiest is the Tywyn or Llanfihangel y Pennant Path (10 miles, six hours), northeast from the Talyllyn Railway terminus at Abergynolwyn; while the shortest and steepest is the Minffordd Path (six miles, five hours), northwest from near the Minffordd Hotel on the A487 road to Machynlleth. Whichever route you choose, always carry clothing for cold and wet weather.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Abergwynant Farm & Pony Trekking Centre (☎422377; www.abergwynantfarn.com; pony treks per hr from £10) leads daily treks through the foothills of Cader Idris. The farm is 3.5 miles southwest of town on the A493.

Sleeping

Local legend says anyone who sleeps atop Cader Idris will awake mad or a poet. We prefer more conventional accommodation.

Dolgun Uchaf (☎422269; www.guesthousessnowdonia.com; tent site per person £5, bunk £10, d from £44; ☒) Try a 500-year-old former Quaker meeting house with an olde-worlde atmosphere but flowery rooms. You can camp here as well, or grab a decent bunk.

Kings YHA hostel (☎0870 770 5900; kings@yha.org.uk; dm £12; 🕑 with 48hr advance booking) Self-catering country-house hostel ideally located for Cader Idris. Take the A493 or bus 28 to Abergwynant and walk the final mile.

Clifton House Hotel (☎422554; www.clifton-house-hotel.co.uk; Smithfield Sq; s/d £50/66, without bathroom £30/58; ☒) Formerly the town jail and a surgery, this hotel now has tidy bedrooms, some with DVD players. Downstairs is a restaurant (mains around £11).

Aber Cottage (☎422460; www.abercottagegallery.com; Smithfield St; d £60; ☒ wifi) Centrally located chunky stone cottage that exudes friendly warmth, with tasteful décor and modern luxuries – this is a longtime fave. The tearoom and restaurant are recommended too.

Tyddyn Mawr (☎422331; Islawrdref, Cader Rd; d £60) Luxury accommodation at the foot of Cader Idris makes this a superb choice, 3 miles southwest of town. Rooms in the farmhouse are enormous and beautifully appointed, but it's the haunting views and unerring peace that lend a unique atmosphere.

Eating

Aber Cottage Tearoom & Restaurant (☎422460; www.abercottagegallery.com; Smithfield St; dishes £5, 5-course evening meals £30; ☒) For anyone who's missing home cooking, enjoy this cosy atmosphere and freshly prepared grub. The huge choice of soups always hits the spot.

Dylanwad Da (☎422870; 2 Smithfield St; mains £11.50-15.50; 🕑 10am-3pm & 7-9pm Thu-Sat) Coffee shop by day, contemporary restaurant by night, this is still the classiest place in town. Flavoursome treats include chicken with spinach and coconut.

Self-caterers can indulge at delicatessen **Popty'r Dref** (☎ 422507; Upper Smithfield St) or grab the basics at **Spar supermarket** (☎ 422200; Plas-yn-Dre St).

Getting There & Away

Buses 32 and X32 serve Aberystwyth (75 minutes, eight daily, twice on Sunday) via Machynlleth, and Bangor (1¾ hours) via Caernarfon – use these services for the Centre for Alternative Technology. Bus 35 serves Blaenau Ffestiniog (50 minutes, seven daily, none on Sunday). Bus 94/X94 travels to Barmouth (25 minutes, at least hourly, four on Sunday), as well as Bala, Llangollen and Wrexham.

BALA (Y BALA)

☎ 01678 / pop 1980

Water sports are the main attraction in Bala, a small market town by Wales' largest natural lake, Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake). Nearby is the National Whitewater Centre, giving visitors a double whammy of aquatic adventure.

The **tourist office** (☎ 521021; bala.tic@gwynedd.gov.uk; Pensarn Rd; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Mon & Thu-Fri) is in the leisure centre 500m southwest of town.

Activities

Near the tourist office, **Bala Adventure & Water Sports Centre** (☎ 521059; www.balawatersports.com; Bala Lake Foreshore; half-day courses £25-40) offers courses in windsurfing, rafting and canoeing. You can also hire sailing boats (one hour £25 to £35, two hours £40 to £50, half-day £55 to £70), kayaks (one hour/two hours/half-day £10/16/25), canoes (one hour/two hours/half-day £20/30/40) and windsurfers (one hour/two hours/half-day £16/24/36) or try orienteering or climbing.

On a 1.5-mile stretch of the River Tryweryn, the adrenaline-inducing **National Whitewater Centre – Canolfan Tryweryn** (☎ 521083; www.ukrafting.co.uk; rafting from £29) offers year-round class-IV white water, fed by a release from the Llyn Celyn reservoir. Book at least two days in advance and check the water levels with the centre before you travel. Find it 3.5 miles northwest of Bala on the A4212.

More serene is **Bala Lake Steam Railway** (☎ 540666; return trip £7; 🕑 4 trips daily Easter-Sep), where vintage locos chuff 4.5 miles (1½ hours return) along the southern bank to Llanuwchllyn. The charming station is off the B4391, half a mile south of town.

Cycling allows you to explore the lakeside, quiet lanes and forestry mountain-bike tracks. Hire bikes and get route details at **Bala Bike Shop** (RH Roberts; ☎ 520252; High St; per half-/full day £7.50/12.50; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Wed Sep-Jun).

Sleeping & Eating

Pen-y-bont Touring & Camping Park (☎ 520549; Llangynog Rd; 2-person tent sites £11; 🕑 Apr-Oct) A mile south on the B4391, this peaceful place is the closest camp site.

Bala Backpackers (☎ 521700; www.bala-backpackers.co.uk; 32 Tegid St; dm £10 Sun-Thu, £11 Fri, £12 Sat, breakfast £3 extra; 🕑 May-Sep & weekends year-round; 🚭) Bright, spacious, airy *and* boasting a piano, 'BB' comes up trumps.

Bryn Tegid (☎ 521645; www.balawales.com/bryntegid; d £80; 🚭) Overlooking the lake, at the far end of town past the tourist office, this elegant pile has expansive gardens and superb views.

There's a couple of mid-price restaurants with main courses around £10. Try **Plas-yn-Dre** (☎ 521256; High St) or **Express Pizzeria** (☎ 520591, Berwyn St).

Getting There & Away

Bus 94/X94 runs 12 times daily (four on Sunday) to Wrexham (1½ hours) via Llangollen (one hour), and to Dolgellau (40 minutes).

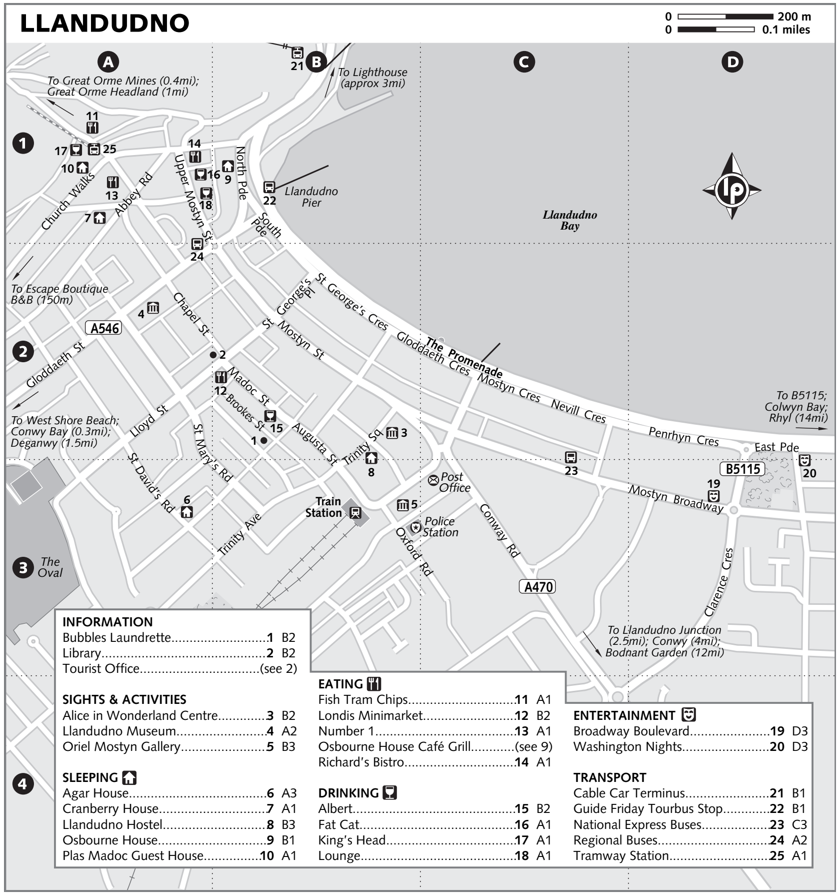
LLANDUDNO

☎ 01492 / pop 14,872

Handsome Llandudno is Wales' largest Victorian seaside resort, with a fantastic location and spectacular period architecture along a sweeping bay. In summer the town bursts at the seams under the weight of holidaying Brits.

The premier attraction is the **Great Orme** (207m), a spectacular 2-mile-long limestone headland jutting in to the Irish Sea. Old-school tramway and cable-car rides go to the summit, providing breathtaking views to the Snowdonia range. On the seafront, traditional delights include an impressive pier and a range of penny-pinching amusement arcades. A more unusual claim to fame is Llandudno's influence on *Alice in Wonderland* – in 1863 the Liddell family, whose daughter was Lewis Carroll's model for Alice, summered at the house that is now the St Tudno Hotel.

Llandudno has often been called 'Costa Geriatrica' due to its year-round popularity with the oldies. Today, while silver-tops continue to migrate here, the scene's slowly changing and good times don't necessarily mean a floral B&B and steaming mug of cocoa. A range of decent bars and restaurants lend a contemporary feel and plans are afoot to attract big-name music acts to the nightlife scene.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C
D
1
2
3
4
To Great Orme Mines (0.4mi); Great Orme Headland (1mi)
To Lighthouse (approx 3mi)
Llandudno Pier
Llandudno Bay
To Escape Boutique B&B (150m)
To West Shore Beach; Conwy Bay (0.3mi); Deganwy (1.5mi)
To B5115; Colwyn Bay; Rhyl (14mi)
To Llandudno Junction (2.5mi); Conwy (4mi); Bodnant Garden (12mi)
The Oval
The Promenade
Train Station
Post Office
Police Station
A546
A470
B5115
Church Walks
Abbey Rd
Upper Mostyn St
North Pde
South Pde
St George's Pl
St George's Cres
Gloddaeth Cres
Mostyn Cres
Nevill Cres
Penrhyn Cres
East Pde
Mostyn Broadway
Mostyn St
Chapel St
Gloddaeth St
Lloyd St
St David's Rd
St Mary's Rd
Madoc St
Brookes St
Augusta St
Trinity Sq
Trinity Ave
Oxford Rd
Conway Rd
Clarence Cres

INFORMATION		
Bubbles Laundrette	1	B2
Library	2	B2
Tourist Office	(see 2)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Alice in Wonderland Centre	3	B2
Llandudno Museum	4	A2
Oriel Mostyn Gallery	5	B3

SLEEPING		
Agar House	6	A3
Cranberry House	7	A1
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Osbourne House	9	B1
Plas Madoc Guest House	10	A1

EATING		
Fish Tram Chips	11	A1
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Number 1	13	A1
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Richard's Bistro	14	A1

DRINKING		
Albert	15	B2
Fat Cat	16	A1
King's Head	17	A1
Lounge	18	A1

ENTERTAINMENT		
Broadway Boulevard	19	D3
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TRANSPORT		
Cable Car Terminus	21	B1
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National Express Buses	23	C3
Regional Buses	24	A2
Tramway Station	25	A1

Orientation & Information

The grand promenade of North Shore Beach lies to the northeast, with Conwy Bay and West Shore Beach to the southwest. Major shops and banks are on Mostyn St, also the stop for regional buses. The train station lies 400m back from the promenade.

Sharing the same building are the **tourist office** (☎ 876413; Mostyn St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 9.30am-4.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter), and the **library** (☎ 574010; Mostyn St; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed, 9am-7pm Thu, 9.30am-1pm Sat), which offers free internet access. **Bubbles Laundrette** (25 Brookes St) opens daily.

Sights & Activities

From sea level it's difficult to gauge the scale of the Great Orme, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Several Neolithic sites nestle on this promontory, and the unbroken views of Snowdonia are supreme. The headland is a designated **country park** (☎ inquiries 874151), boasting a cornucopia of flowers, butterflies, moths and sea birds. The tourist office has information.

You can walk to the summit, take the **Great Orme Tramway** (☎ 876749; www.greatormetramway.co.uk; return trip £4.80; 🕑 10am-6pm Easter-Oct), which leaves every 20 minutes from Church Walks, or ride Britain's longest **cable car** (one-way/return trip £4.95/5.50) from Happy Valley above the pier – departures are weather dependent. The summit has a visitor centre which has picnic tables, a café and leaflets on the natural history.

Extending 670m into the sea, the elegant 1877 Victorian **pier** was once a major embarkation point for Isle of Man steamers.

Guide Friday (☎ 879133; full trip £6.50; 🕑 May-Sep) does hop-on hop-off bus **sightseeing trips** combining Llandudno and Conwy, departing from the pier half-hourly.

North Wales' leading contemporary art venue is the cool **Oriel Mostyn** (☎ 879201; www.mostyn.org; 12 Vaughan St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which has changing exhibitions, beautiful and puzzling alike. More-traditional artefacts are housed at **Llandudno Museum** (☎ 876517; 17-19 Gloddaeth St; adult/child £1.50/75p; 🕑 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 2.15-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter).

Kids like the **Alice in Wonderland Centre** (☎ 860082; 3 Trinity Sq; adult £2.95; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter), and if you just want to relax, take a stroll at the calming **West Shore**.

The trip to fabulous Bodnant Garden (p738) is a popular excursion.

Sleeping

You can't camp in Llandudno, but there is an astonishing array of accommodation for all budgets.

Llandudno Hostel (☎ 877430; 14 Charlton St; dm £15, s/d £22/35, s/d without bathroom £20/33) Rave reviews continue for this family-run Victorian pile. Super-clean and with private rooms, but no self-catering facilities.

Plas Madoc Guest House (☎ 876514; www.plasmadocguesthouse.co.uk; 60 Church Walks; s/d from £30/50; ☒) Clean, crisp rooms with original features, a friendly welcome and vegetarian or vegan breakfasts are the order of the day at tidy Plas Madoc.

Agar House (☎ 875572; www.agarhouse.co.uk; 17 St David's Rd; s/d from £36/52) Comfortable and reliable option on this leafy residential street.

Cranberry House (☎ 879760; 12 Abbey Rd; d from £50; ☒) Graceful décor on an upmarket street a short walk from town.

our pick **Escape Boutique B&B** (☎ 877776; www.escapebandb.co.uk; 48 Church Walks; d £75-105; ☒ wi-fi) Gorgeous Victorian villa overlooking the town, offering an escape in the truest sense. The guest lounge, with its 42-inch plasma screen and honesty bar, is the epitome of cool, while the luxurious rooms are themed (urban cool, retro, New York loft style), and feature DVD players, superb en suites and mega-comfy beds. Breakfast is an experience *par excellence*, with quality local and organic fare.

Lighthouse (☎ 876819; www.lighthouse-llandudno.co.uk; Marine Dr; d £140) The lights went out in 1985 but the lighthouse saw a new dawn as a luxury hideaway. It's chock-full of original features, such as portholes and a slate fireplace, and the views are immense, but it gets battered in winter. Situated in the Great Orme country park.

Osborne House (☎ 860330; www.osbornehouse.com; 17 North Pde; ste £145-220; 🏊) Canopied beds, down duvets, marble bathrooms and roll-top baths – this is *real* Victorian opulence, with sea views. The six suites are a bit fussy for some, but heaven for others. The café and grill come recommended.

Eating & Drinking

Fish Tram Chips (22-24 Old Rd; fish & chips £4.40; 🕑 noon-2.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) The seaside ain't the seaside without fish and chips, and this place, next to the tram station, is the best in town.

Osborne House Café Grill (lunch £3.50-9, mains £8.50-15.50; 🕑 10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-9pm Sun) Dine by candlelight on treats such as breast of Barbary duck in orange and ginger sauce. This is one of Llandudno's finest choices, offering a touch of opulence for all budgets.

Number 1 (☎ 875424; Old Rd; mains £12.50-16.25; 🕑 5.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat) This place might sound like a 1980s wine bar, but bookings are recommended if you want to savour the lip-smacking baked guinea fowl or venison sausages.

Richard's Bistro (☎ 875315; 7 Church Walks; 3-course dinner £25; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sat) Has a bland name but strong reputation among local foodies.

Upper Mostyn St remains a trendy hangout. Grab a pint and decent platter (£4.50 to £12.50) at these café-bars.

Fat Cat (☎ 871844; 149 Upper Mostyn St) Stylish Llandudno branch of this Welsh mini-chain.

Lounge (☎ 876120; 143 Upper Mostyn St) Skin-deep Art Deco–style wine bar, with no real substance.

There's a **Londis minimarket** (🕑 7am-11pm) on the junction near the tourist office.

Entertainment

Llandudno clubbers groove at **Broadway Boulevard** (☎ 879614; Mostyn Broadway; 🕑 10pm-3am), and **Washington Nights** (☎ 877974; East Pde; 🕑 9pm-2am Thu-Sat). For ale-sinking in a traditional pub, try the **Albert** (☎ 877188; Madoc St) or **King's Head** (☎ 877993; Old Rd).

Getting There & Away

BUS

National Express (☎ 08705 808080) bus 545 passes through Llandudno daily to London (£26, 8½ hours) via Birmingham and Chester, and to Pwllheli (£6.50, two hours) via Bangor.

Bus 5 runs every 15 minutes (hourly on Sunday) to Caernarfon (1½ hours) and Bangor (65 minutes) via the railway interchange at Llandudno Junction (20 minutes) and Conwy (25 minutes). Bus 9 runs every half-hour (none on Sunday) to Llandudno Junction (12 minutes) and Bangor (55 minutes). Snowdon Sherpa bus S2 runs to Llanberis (two hours) via Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig and Pen-y-Pass.

TRAIN

Conwy Valley line trains serve Blaenau Ffestiniog (£5.50, 65 minutes, four times daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Betws-y-Coed.

Hourly direct services run to Manchester (£20.10, 2¼ hours) via Chester (£11.70, one hour). Most Sunday services require a change at Llandudno Junction, which also has connections to London Euston (£55.10, four to 6½ hours, at least hourly, fewer on Sunday) and other regional options.

CONWY

☎ **01492** / **pop 3847**

History buffs shouldn't miss this small but sturdy walled castle-town on the estuary of the River Conwy. The castle, one of Wales' finest, dominates the town and is a Unesco World Heritage Site. Inside the town walls, the colourful streets contain a mix of medieval and Victorian buildings, together with a couple of contemporary cafés.

The approach to the castle gate is theatrical, with three bridges spanning the river: Thomas Telford's 1826 suspension bridge (now pedestrianised), Robert Stephenson's 1848 steel railway span and the newer road crossing.

The **tourist office** (☎ 592248; 🕑 9.30am-6pm Easter-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Easter) is at the castle gift shop. There's free internet access at the **library** (☎ 596242; Castle St).

Sights

CONWY CASTLE & TOWN WALL

Another great bastion in Edward I's Welsh defences, **Conwy Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 592358; admission £4.50; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Apr-May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Easter) was built in just five years (1282–87) following the conquest of Gwynedd. Today it is deservedly a World Heritage Site.

The shape of the castle was dictated by the rock on which it was built, with eight huge drum towers punctuating the soaring curtain walls. Inside it's quite dilapidated, but fun to explore nonetheless – it's especially easy to imagine important gatherings in the now-roofless great hall. From the battlements, views across the estuary and to the peaks of Snowdonia – when it's not veiled in cloud – are exhilarating.

The 1200m-long **town wall** was built simultaneously with the castle, guarding Conwy's residents at night. You can walk significant sections of the wall, complete with 22 towers, of which Upper Gate gives the best views.

OTHER SIGHTS

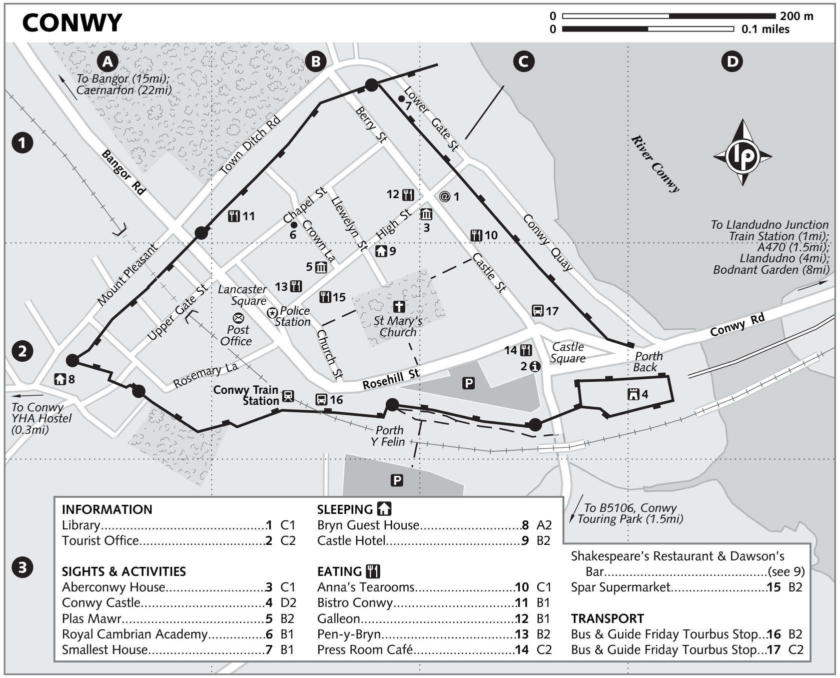
Two historic houses within the walls are worth visiting.

One of Britain's finest surviving Elizabethan town houses, **Plas Mawr** (Cadw; ☎ 580167; High St; adult/child £4.90/4.50; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-May & Sep, 9.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9.30am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct) was built in 1585. The tall, whitewashed exterior is an indication of the owner's status, but gives no clue of the vivid friezes of the interior. The admission price includes a helpful audio tour. A combined ticket including entrance to the castle costs £7.

Nearby, intriguing timber-and-plaster **Aberconwy House** (NT; ☎ 592246; Castle St; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕑 11am-5pm Wed-Mon Easter-Oct) is a well-restored 14th-century merchant's dwelling that has served as coffee house, hotel, bakery and antique shop.

Behind Plas Mawr, the modern **Royal Cambrian Academy** (☎ 593413; Crown Lane; 🕑 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun) is a premier Welsh arts institution. Admission to the interesting exhibitions is often free.

Down on the quay, a minuscule dwelling claims to be the UK's **smallest house** (adult 75p). At 3.05m high and 1.8m wide, it doesn't give you a lot for your money.


CONWY
0 200 m
0 0.1 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
To Bangor (15mi); Caernarfon (22mi)
Bangor Rd
Town Ditch Rd
Berry St
Lower Gate St
River Conwy
Mount Pleasant
Chapel St
Llewelyn St
Crown La
High St
Conwy Quay
Castle St
Upper Gate St
Lancaster Square
Post Office
Police Station
Church St
St Mary's Church
Rosemary La
Rosehill St
Castle Square
Porth Back
Conwy Rd
To Llandudno Junction Train Station (1mi); A470 (1.5mi); Llandudno (4mi); Bodnant Garden (8mi)
Conwy Train Station
To Conwy YHA Hostel (0.3mi)
Porth Y Felin
To B5106, Conwy Touring Park (1.5mi)
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Shakespeare's Restaurant & Dawson's Bar....(see 9)
Spar Supermarket....15 B2
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Bus & Guide Friday Tourbus Stop...16 B2
Bus & Guide Friday Tourbus Stop...17 C2

Guide Friday hop-on hop-off sightseeing bus trips, combining Conwy and Llandudno (p736), stop beside the train station and in Castle Sq.

Day-trippers love fantastic **Bodnant Garden** (NT; ☎ 650460; adult/child £6/3; ⏰ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct), where global plants and flowers flourish over 80 colourful acres. Summer sees roses, water lilies, hydrangeas and clematis in full bloom. The garden lies 7 miles south off the A470 in the Vale of Conwy. Bus 25 from Llandudno passes by hourly. From Conwy, board at Llandudno Junction.

Sleeping

Conwy Touring Park (☎ 592856; 2-person tent sites £4-10.85) Pleasant, leafy site, but without a car it's a steep 1.5-mile trek south on the B5106.

Conwy YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5774; conwy@yha.org.uk; Sychnant Pass Rd; dm £15.50) Decent facilities but drab location, a 10-minute walk from the centre. Dorms have shower rooms and private beds are available.

Bryn Guest House (☎ 592449; www.bryn.org.uk; Sychnant Pass Rd; s/d £37/54; 🚭) Under the highest point of the town walls, here's a solid, spacious home with large rooms and excellent views of Conwy and Snowdonia.

Castle Hotel (☎ 582800; www.castlewales.co.uk; High St; s/d from £75/110) Mixing contemporary style with historic features (for example, a 1570s four-poster bed) proves a winning formula. The attached Shakespeare's Restaurant & Dawson's Bar is recommended.

Eating

Shakespeare's Restaurant & Dawson's Bar (☎ 582800; www.castlewales.co.uk; High St; bar dishes £4.50-8.50, restaurant mains £8-14) Attached to the Castle Hotel on High St. Here you can have anything from a simple bar snack to artistically presented bistro dishes such as smoked salmon or lobster.

Press Room Café (☎ 592242; 3 Rosehill St; mains £5-14; ⏰ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Wed & Sun, 10.30am-4.30pm & 7-9pm Thu-Sat) With an outdoor courtyard, this cool place serves stylish, tasty dishes such as steamed sea bass with ginger and spring onions.

Bistro Conwy (☎ 596326; 26 Chapel St; mains £14) Blending modern and traditional Welsh dishes, this place, squashed against the town wall, is a real favourite. Try the local Conwy mussels if you can.

Anna's Tearooms (Castle St) and **Pen-y-bryn** (28 High St) are two time-honoured places for sandwiches or afternoon tea. For filling fish and chips, try the **Galleon** (☎ 593391, 2 High St; fish & chips £4).

The Spar supermarket is on High St.

Getting There & Away

Bus 5 serves Caernarfon (70 minutes, every 15 minutes, hourly on Sunday) via Bangor, and Llandudno (20 minutes) via Llandudno Junction (five minutes).

Trains on the London–Holyhead line serve London Euston (£60.30, four hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, once Sunday) via Crewe.

BANGOR

☎ 01248 / pop 15,280

Scruffy Bangor is a small university city swollen with students who lend a cool edge to an otherwise uninspiring place. Positioned just outside Snowdonia National Park, Bangor is within striking distance of several major attractions and has good transport links, but is of little interest in its own right. The city is the last stop before the historic bridge to the Isle of Anglesey.

Bangor's **tourist office** (☎ 352786; Deiniol Rd; ⏰ 9.30am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is near the police station and post office.

Most of **St Deiniol's Cathedral**, small, proud and lopsided, is the result of 19th-century restoration. Its treasure is the evocative 500-year-old, carved-oak Mostyn Christ. The pretty Victorian **pier** (adult 25p; ⏰ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun) stretches 450m out into the Menai Strait.

Sleeping & Eating

Bangor YHA hostel (☎ 0870 770 5686; bangor@yha.org.uk; Tan-y-bryn; dm £12.50; ⏰ Apr-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) Large Victorian mansion half a mile from town.

Tregarth Homestay (☎ 600532; www.tregarth-homestay.com; Llain Y Grug, Dob, Tregarth; s/d £25/50; 🚭) With craggy views and a sun terrace, this walker- and cyclist-friendly place is handily located for the mountains. It's 6 miles from town – take bus 6 or 7 to Tregarth.

Herbs Restaurant (☎ 351249; 162 High St; mains £2.50-12) A veggie delight. Enjoy a range of salads and healthy options as well as organic meat and fish dishes.

Java (☎ 361652; High St; mains £4-12) Hidden up an alley off High St, this remains a cool place to be. The international menu includes the saliva-inducing Malaysian beef randang.

Fat Cat Cafe Bar (☎ 370445; 161 High St; mains £5-12; ⏰ 11am-11pm Mon, 10am-11pm Tue-Thu, 10am-midnight Fri & Sat, 11am-10.30pm Sun) The original of this Welsh mini-chain. Grab a tasty burger or latte and chill in comfy basement sofas or on the summertime balcony.

Ristorante Pulcinella (☎ 362807; Pier Promenade; mains £5.50-14.50; ⏰ dinner Tue-Sat) Tried-and-tested pizza place with a scenic pier-side location.

Entertainment

Bangor bursts with pubs. Decent ones include the nautically themed **Skerries Inn** (☎ 352277; 374 High St), **Tap & Spile** (☎ 370835; Garth Rd), by the pier, and student favourite **Belle View** (☎ 364439; Holyhead Rd) in Upper Bangor.

Getting There & Away

BUS

National Express coach 545 runs daily to London (£27.50, nine hours) via Birmingham.

Bus 1 runs hourly to Blaenau Ffestiniog (two hours), via Porthmadog and Caernarfon. Buses 5 and 5X run to Caernarfon (30 minutes) and Llandudno (one hour), at least half-hourly. Buses 85 and 86 serve Llanberis (45 minutes, hourly), while the X32 travels to Aberystwyth (£5, 3½ hours, five daily), via Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Dolgellau and Machynlleth. All services are less frequent on Sunday.

TRAIN

Trains operate to Chester (£13.50, 70 minutes, at least hourly) and London Euston (£62.90, four hours, three daily direct).

AROUND BANGOR

Penrhyn Castle

East of Bangor is **Penrhyn Castle** (NT; ☎ 353084; adult/child £8/4, garden only £5.40/2.70; ⏰ noon-5pm Wed-Mon Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug), a magnificent 19th-century fantasy dwelling – constructed between 1820 and 1845 – overlooking the sea. Thomas Hopper used neo-Norman style for the Pennant family, the original owners who made their fortune in Welsh slate and Jamaican sugar. The interior features elaborate carvings, beautiful paintings and (the crowning glory) a one-ton slate bed made for Queen Victoria. The tourist office can explain the 2-mile walking route.

CAERNARFON

☎ 01286 / pop 9726

There's a wonderful romantic air about colossal Caernarfon Castle, guarding the River Seiont on the Menai Strait. The final link in Edward I's 'iron ring', the site is one of Wales' finest, and deservedly has World Heritage status, together with its neighbours at Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris. Who could deny the buzz of exploring the labyrinth of spiral staircases and bulging battlements?

Conflict followed Caernarfon all the way to the 20th century, when in 1911 then prime minister (and Welshman) David Lloyd George declared Caernarfon Castle as the setting of the investiture ceremony for the heir to the British throne. It was an attempt to bring the royals closer to the Welsh constituency, but it backfired spectacularly. Caernarfon is a strong Welsh heartland, and the anti-Crown mentality reached an (almost) explosive climax in 1969. At the investiture of Charles, the current heir to the throne, there was an attempt to blow up his train.

The modern town sprawls east from the medieval walls (which you can't walk), with good amenities, but most places of interest remain close to the castle. Nocturnal Caernarfon has developed a gritty reputation recently, so exercise caution.

Orientation & Information

Caernarfon's focus is the castle, located beside an oversized car park by the river. The medieval walls enclose a compact area, four streets wide and two deep.

The **tourist office** (☎ 672232; caernarfon.tourist office@gwynedd.gov.uk; Castle St; ⌚ 9.30am-5.30pm) is by the castle.

Sights & Activities

Caernarfon Castle (Cadw; ☎ 677617; adult/child £4.75/4.50; ⌚ 9.30am-5pm Easter-May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) was built between 1283 and 1301, standing as Edward I's most impressive stronghold. Almost impregnable, the polygonal towers and colour-banded masonry were based on Constantinople's 5th-century walls, and set it apart from the other castles of north Wales. Twenty-eight bedraggled men withstood a 1404 siege from Owain Glyndŵr's army here, and during the 17th-century Civil War the castle was unsuccessfully attacked three times.

Caernarfon Castle was originally built as a seat of government rule and royal palace; the towers were decorated with ornate stained glass. The Eagle Tower is the finest remaining example. In the Queen's Tower is a museum celebrating Wales' oldest infantry regiment, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Other towers contain exhibits on Edward I's campaigns and the 1969 investiture.

Away from the castle, take a pleasure-boat trip with **Menai Strait Cruises** (☎ 672772; sightseeing cruises adult/child £4.50/2.50; ⌚ noon-5pm late May–Jun, Sep & Oct, 11.30am-6pm Jul & Aug), which runs 40-minute tours from Slate Quay beside the castle, tide permitting.

By the quayside is the small **Maritime Museum** (☎ 675194; Victoria Dock; adult/child £1/50p; ⌚ noon-4pm Sun-Fri), with the huge anchor of the wrecked HMS *Conwy*, which ran aground in 1956.

Between Caernarfon and Rhyd Ddu runs one of Wales' many restored narrow-gauge railways, the vintage **Welsh Highland Railway** (☎ 677018; www.whr.co.uk; 3hr return trip £16.50). The 12-mile ride provides wonderful, ghostly scenery. The station is on St Helen's Rd, 300m upriver from the castle. The line should eventually be reinstated all the way through the mountains to Porthmadog, where a shorter stretch is also operational (p730).

One mile southeast of the castle, on the A4085 to Beddgelert, are the excavated foundations of **Segontium** (Cadw; ☎ 675625; admission free; ⌚ grounds 10.30am-4.30pm, museum 12.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun), a significant Roman fort dating from AD 77. The site was occupied for 300 years by around 1000 men. The small museum supplies the information needed to appreciate the site.

The tourist office has details of **walking** and **cycling** trails leaving Caernarfon in opposite directions; the scenic 4.5-mile **Lôn Las Menai** along the strait towards Bangor, and the 12-mile **Lôn Eifion** south to Bryncir. **Beics Menai** (☎ 676804; www.beicsmenai.co.uk; Slate Quay; bikes per 2/4/6/8hr £10/12/14/16) provides cycle hire.

Sleeping

Cadnant Valley Camping & Caravan Park (☎ 673196; www.cwmcadnantvalley.co.uk; Llanberis Rd; 2-person tent sites around £11; ⌚ Easter-Oct) On the A4086 to Llanberis, this is a pleasant parkland site.

Totters (☎ 672963; www.totters.co.uk; 2 High St; dm incl breakfast £14) Nothing special from the outside, terrific Totters nestles inside the town walls. With clean, fresh dorms, a 14th-century stone-walled basement-cum–breakfast room, comfy lounges and good self-catering facilities, it's a great independent hostel.

Black Boy Inn (☎ 673604; Northgate St; s/d £52.25/57, without bathroom & incl breakfast s/d £33.25/38) Dating from 1522, this traditional inn has original wooden beams and panelling, and walls 1.5m thick! In keeping with the style, rooms have old furnishings.

Caer Menai (☎ 672612; 15 Church St; d £50-60) There's a slightly dated feel about the setup at this Georgian-era guesthouse, but all rooms have en suite and the location inside the walls can't be beaten.

Eating

Doc Café Bar (☎ 685200; www.galericaernarfon.com; Galeri; mains £5.50-7.95; ⌚ 9.30am-5.30pm) A short walk from the castle, contemporary Doc offers stylish snacks and light lunches in super-cool, arty surroundings – think deep red, clean white and natural wood. Catch a show or see a film here as well.

Stone's Bistro (☎ 671152; Hole in the Wall St; mains £10.25-14.50; ⌚ dinner Tue-Sat) Renowned for Welsh lamb, Stone's has an open kitchen so you can see your food being prepared. With dark décor, the far corners can be gloomy, so try for a window seat.

Ogof-y-Ddraig (☎ 677322; Hole in the Wall St; mains £10-16; ⌚ lunch & dinner) The name means 'The Dragon's Cave', and here there's a traditional Welsh theme and dishes created with locally sourced ingredients. Good vegetarian options.

Getting There & Away

Caernarfon has no train services, but buses abound.

National Express coach 545 passes through Caernarfon daily to London (£27.50, 9½ hours) via Chester and Birmingham, and the 380 goes to Pwllheli (£5.70, 65 minutes).

Snowdon Sherpa bus S4 runs about hourly (less frequently on Sunday) to Pen-y-Pas (65 minutes) via Snowdon Ranger YHA hostel and Beddgelert. Bus 1 runs hourly to Porthmadog (45 minutes), and Blaenau Ffestiniog (1½ hours); other services run less frequently on Sunday. Bus 5 serves Bangor (25 minutes) and Llandudno every half-hour (fewer on Sunday). The X32 serves Aberystwyth five times daily. Buses 9 and 88 run to Llanberis (twice-hourly, hourly on Sunday) and 12 serves Pwllheli (45 minutes, hourly, three on Sunday).

ISLE OF ANGLESEY

After the rugged majesty of Snowdonia, some find the low-lying planes of the Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn) disappointing. For others, travelling east from the ferry port of Holyhead, the mountainous vista sets pulses racing. But don't let Snowdon's looming presence distract you: there are unique charms here, and visitors who explore will find miles of inspiring coastline and Wales' greatest concentration of ancient sites.

Fertile Anglesey provides north Wales with much of its wheat and cattle, and has a long history of habitation. Good farming probably played a role in attracting a considerable early population, while the island was holy to the Celts. Often referred to as Mam Cymru – Mother of Wales – it was the last outpost to fall to the Romans.

In 1826 Thomas Telford established the first permanent link to the mainland. His 174m bridge across the Menai Strait has a 30m-high central span, allowing the passage of tall ships. By 1850 a second crossing was under construction – Robert Stephenson's **Britannia Bridge** carried the newly laid railway. Today, this bridge also carries the bulk of the road traffic, much of which hurtles directly to the Irish ferries at Holyhead.

Mostly in coastal locations, Anglesey's ancient remains number around 20, spanning the ages from prehistoric to Roman and early Christian times. Top billing goes to Neolithic burial mound **Bryn Celli Ddhu** (600m from the car park on the A4080 west of Plas Newydd, two miles west of Llanfair PG).

LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWLLLLANTYSILIOGOGOGOCH

Leave this tourist trap to the geriatric shutterbugs who roll in on the tour buses, and save your time for somewhere else. The name (meaning 'St Mary's Church in the hollow of the White Hazel near a rapid whirlpool and the Church of St Tysilio near the Red Cave') was an 1860s invention to propel the village to national stardom. Nowadays laziness has set in and the 58 letters are generally shortened to Llanfair PG or Llanfairpwll.

Nevertheless, this is still the village with the longest name in Britain, and some claim in Europe, and the tour buses continue to come here. After all, how many other stations do you know where the platform ticket has to be 15cm long just to fit the name on?

AROUND LLANFAIR PG

Plas Newydd

With magnificent views across the Menai Strait to Snowdonia, this **stately home** (NT; ☎ 01248-714795; adult £6; 🕒 house noon-5pm Sat-Wed, gardens 11am-5.30pm Sat-Wed Easter-Oct) is an 18th-century Gothic masterpiece. Designed for the Marquis of Anglesey, the house contains the largest permanent collection of Rex Whistler works, including an enormous, fantastical dreamscape of Mt Snowdon – the single canvas is an unbelievable 18m wide. Plas Newydd is 1.5 miles south of Llanfair PG train station. Don't confuse it with the Ladies of Llangollen's Plas Newydd.

BEAUMARIS (BIWMARES)

☎ 01248 / pop 1513

Formerly Anglesey's principal town and foremost port, Beaumaris boasts abundant history. With a waterfront location, the romantic castle lords over a pretty collection of Georgian buildings, all set against the magical Snowdonia backdrop. Water sports are the main draw today – in early 2006 plans were approved to build a new 400-berth marina at Gallows Point.

Sights & Activities

Beaumaris Castle (Cadw; ☎ 810361; adult/child £3.50/3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is the last of Edward I's great castles of North Wales, and the largest. It was built by the brilliant military architect James of St George, between 1295 and 1298, on a flat shoreline site that allowed a symmetrical design. Although money ran out before fortifications were completed – the result being a fortress of greater charm than menace – the castle is deservedly a World Heritage Site. Despite its squat appearance, its defences were strong, with multiple walls and murder-holes for dousing invaders with boiling oil.

Allow two hours to visit the historic museum of crime and punishment, **Beaumaris Courthouse & Gaol** (☎ 810921; adult/child courthouse £2.50/1.75, gaol £3/2.25; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Easter-Sep). The courthouse is nearly 400 years old and the creepy gaol contains the last-surviving treadwheel in Britain (for hard-labour prisoners).

Puffin Island is a haven for seals and puffins, and **Starida Sea Services** (☎ 810251; www.starida.co.uk) runs (weather-dependent) one-hour **cruises** (adult/child £5/4, six daily Easter to October), as well as fishing trips and Menai Strait cruises. Book at the kiosk on the pier.

Sleeping & Eating

Kingsbridge Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 490636; Llanfaes; 2-person tent sites £10.50-12.50) Scenic meadow site situated 1.5 miles north of Beaumaris on the B5109 towards Llangoed.

Cleifiog (☎ 811507; www.cleifiog.co.uk; Townsend; s/d £40/75; 🚭) There's a seafront location at the east end of the village for this above-average B&B that used to be a monks' hospice.

Ye Olde Bulls Head Inn (☎ 810329; Castle St; d from £98.50) Tasteful rooms at this 1472 inn are named after characters from Charles Dickens' novels. Dinner treats (three-course dinners £35, mains £5.50 to £14.60) include Anglesey beef or a contemporary charcuterie selection.

Getting There & Away

Buses 53, 56, 57 and 58 run to Bangor (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday).

HOLYHEAD (CAERGYBI) & HOLY ISLAND (YNYS CYBI)

☎ 01407 / pop 11,237

There's not much for tourists in the working town of Holyhead, the major departure point for ferries to Ireland. The surrounding coastline is splendid, but that may not be enough to provoke a lengthy stay.

The **tourist office** (☎ 762622; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun, closed 1-2pm) is in Terminal 1 at the ferry port.

You might be surprised to find a progressive arts centre here, but the **Ucheldre Centre** (☎ 763361; Ucheldre Ave; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) is just that. The converted church hosts film, drama and live music.

Holyhead is the starting point for the Lôn Las Cymru cycle route (p651), and the rugged coastline provides good walking. To the west is **Holyhead Mountain** (220m). At its western base, signposted from town, is **South Stack lighthouse**, open to all visitors who can tackle the 400-step descent to the offshore rock. Anglesey's main water-sports centre is **Trearddur Bay**, 2.5 miles south of Holyhead.

Sleeping & Eating

Anglesey Outdoors (☎ 769351; www.angleseyoutdoors.com; Porthdafarch Rd; tent sites per person £3, dm £10, tipi per night from £60) Two miles south of town. Get your fill of outdoor sports such as canoeing and sea-kayaking, or curl up by the fire in a super-snug six-person Native American-Indian tipi.

B&Bs in Holyhead are accustomed to late arrivals off the ferry:

Min-y-Don (☎ 762718; www.holyheadhotel.com; 2 Newry Fawr; s/d from £20/45) Friendly welcome at this centrally located guesthouse.

Yr Hendre (☎ 762929; www.yr-hendre.co.uk; Porth-y-Felin Rd; d £55; 🚭) A cut above average, Yr Hendre has smart rooms with pleasant outlooks.

At the Ucheldre Centre, **Ucheldre Kitchen** (☎ 763361; Ucheldre Ave; mains £5; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun) dishes out simple but well-priced staples such as jacket potatoes and afternoon tea.

Getting There & Away

Irish Ferries (☎ 08705 17 17 17; www.irishferries.com) and **Stena Line** (☎ 08705 70 70 70; www.stenaline.com) run ferries from Holyhead to Ireland (p968).

Bus 4 serves Bangor (1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday). On Sunday, bus 44 operates every two hours.

Trains to Chester (£12.50, 1¾ hours), via Bangor and Llandudno Junction (£8.90, 55 minutes), run hourly, as do services to London Euston (£65.50, four to five hours).

LLŶN PENINSULA

Isolated physically and culturally from the rest of Wales, this 24-mile long finger jutting into the sea is a stronghold of Welsh nationalism. Plaid Cywru, the nationalist party, was founded here in 1925, and Welsh remains the language of everyday life.

The Llŷn (khlee'en) also provides isolation in abundance, with more than 70 miles of largely unspoilt coastline, much under the stewardship of the National Trust (NT). Windswept sandy beaches are a feature, notably at sailing town **Abersoch**, surf-lover's **Hell's Mouth** (Porth Neigwl) and, on the north coast, water-sports centre **Porth Dinllaen**. Near the tip of the peninsula, whitewashed **Aberdaron** can feel like the end of the earth, but it's the place to catch a boat to the early Christian site of Bardsey Island (see the boxed text, p744).

For details of buses see Pwllheli (p744). Beyond Pwllheli, Abersoch has the only **tourist office** (☎ 01758-712929; enquiries@abersochtouristinfo.co.uk; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-3pm Mar & Oct, 11am-1pm Nov-Feb).

CRICCIETH (CRICIETH)

☎ 01766 / pop 1826

Criccieth is just 4 miles from Porthmadog and the journey is worthwhile. For the casual visitor, this genteel seaside village holds greater attractions than its more commercial neighbour. Most visitors take a day-trip to the clifftop castle, with sweeping views over Tremadog Bay, but there are also decent accommodation and dining options. The nearest tourist office is at Pwllheli.

Little remains of **Criccieth Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 522227; adult/child £2.90/2.40; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Jun, 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, open site Nov-Easter), but its wonderfully romantic position atop the cliff gives panoramic views. Originally constructed by native Welsh prince Llywelyn the Great in 1239, the castle was overrun in 1283 by Edward I's forces, who probably added the distinctive twin-towered gatehouse. In 1404 Owain Glyndŵr recovered the fortress for the Welsh, destroying it beyond further military use.

Sleeping & Eating

Lion Hotel (☎ 522460; www.lionhotelcriccieth.co.uk; s/d from £38/66) Slightly dated in décor, this traditional hotel nevertheless has comfy-enough rooms, some with good castle views.

Moelwyn (☎ 522500; www.themoelwyn.co.uk; Mona Tce; s/d from £39/58) Rooms here have that fresh, seaside feel, while the restaurant (mains £8.50 to £16, open for dinner only) does delicious seafood, meat and veggie dishes.

Glan Y Mor (☎ 523012; Glan Y Mor; d from £50; 🚭) Imposing Art Deco house in large gardens with open sea views. If you want to be set back from the centre of town, this option will suit you perfectly.

Poachers (☎ 522512; 66-68 High St; mains £9.50-18.50; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) Quite a mix here, from German meatballs to Caesar salad, Tex-Mex to Welsh rabbit, and butternut squash to pan-seared swordfish.

Getting There & Away

Bus 3 runs half-hourly to Porthmadog (15 minutes, six on Sunday) and Pwllheli (25 minutes).

Trains between Porthmadog (eight minutes, about every two hours, three on Sunday) and Pwllheli stop at Criccieth.

BOATING TO BARDSEY

Tiny Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli), a 2-mile-long spit off the tip of the peninsula, was an early Christian site known as the Isle of 20,000 Saints. St Cadfan created a monastery here in the 6th century and, at a time when journeys to Italy were long and perilous, three pilgrimages to Bardsey equalled one to Rome.

In summer, the **Bardsey Island Trust** (☎ 08458-1136554; www.bardsey.org; return trip £25) operates daily ferries to the island from Porth Meudwy (1.5 miles west of Aberdaron) and Pwllheli. The trip takes 15 minutes but is dependent on weather and demand, so call a couple of days in advance. You have three to four hours on the island to see 6th-century carved stones, 13th-century abbey ruins and a significant colony of Manx shearwaters.

PWLLHELI

☎ 01758 / pop 3861

The administrative capital for the Llŷn, Pwllheli (poolth-heh-lee) is a staid town of staunch Welsh tradition and the birthplace of Plaid Cymru.

There's little for visitors other than pleasant walking up and down the South Beach promenade, together with a little clutch of cafés and gift shops. It's also the terminus of the Cambrian Coaster railway, and as far as most tourists get without the aid of a car.

The well-stocked **tourist office** (☎ 613000; pwllheli.touristoffice@gwynedd.gov.uk; 🕘 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat Nov-Mar) is opposite the train station.

Sleeping & Eating

Bayview Guest House (☎ 613808; www.bayview-guesthouse.co.uk; 1 Bay View Tce; s/d £22.50/40) Respectable budget choice overlooking the marina.

ESI Café Bar (☎ 701321; Station Sq; lunch £3.50-7, mains £12-16; 🕘 11am-11pm, food to 9pm) This café-bar tries to be super-hip (all moody black-and-white contrasts) but forgets it's neither in Cardiff nor London. Still, the contemporary food's pretty good.

Amigos (☎ 612248; Station Sq; mains £8.50-10.75; 🕘 6-9.30pm Mon-Thu) Cheery restaurant with standard Mexican fodder.

Plas Bodegros (☎ 612363; www.bodegros.com; 3-course dinners £40; 🕘 dinner Tue-Sun, lunch Sun; 🚭) This place is proud to be Wales' only five-star restaurant with rooms (singes/doubles from £50/110). The sumptuous furnishings and melt-in-the-mouth delights at Bodegros make the trip to Pwllheli worthwhile. It's 1 mile west of town on the A497.

Getting There & Away

Buses to the east include bus 3 to Porthmadog (35 minutes, every half-hour, six on Sunday) and 12 to Caernarfon (45 minutes, hourly, three on Sunday). Heading east along the Llŷn are bus 8 to Nefyn (15 minutes, about hourly, four on Sunday), 17 to Aberdaron (40 minutes, every two hours, none on Sunday) and 18 to Abersoch (25 minutes, about hourly, four on Sunday).

Pwllheli is the terminus of the Cambrian Coaster rail line. Trains run to Machynlleth (£10, two hours) via Porthmadog every two or three hours Monday to Friday (fewer on weekends).

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Northwest England

Britain's industrial heartbeat thumped loudest in the northwest of England, which may be a fact of great fascination to historians and gadget boffins, but it's hardly an invitation to visit; after all, what could there possibly be of enduring interest in jam-packed conurbations and the heaving hulks of the industrial past?

Crammed into the relatively tight confines are a couple of the most exciting cities in Britain, a picture-postcard whose rich layers of history are revealed in its multitiered architecture and the most eye-popping, stomach-turning rollercoaster we've ever been dizzy on. Oh, and the birthplace of the world's best-ever band, bar none. Life, music, history and hedonism. And for those eager for a bit of respite from the concrete pawprint of man, there's some of the most beautiful countryside in England. Not bad for a region that changed the world.

That's right, for the northwest was the very place where the Industrial Revolution was born and raised into the overwhelming force of capitalism; where, in Manchester, the world's first modern city was conceived; and where the endless possibilities of the Age of Reason were put through their original paces.

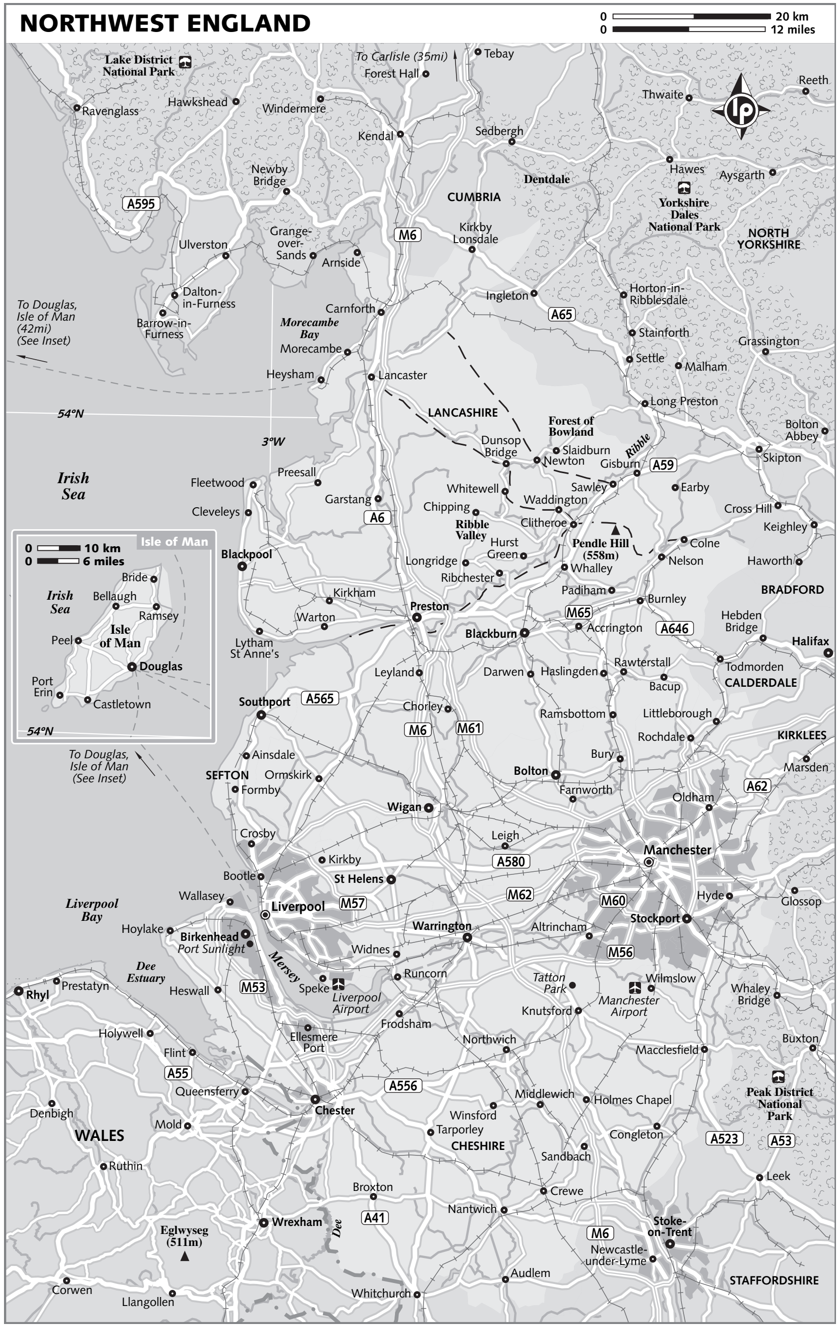
These days, however, the northwest is all about looking forward, about being the region that leaves its imprint on the 21st century in the way that it did for the last couple. A tall order, no doubt, but the region knows a thing or two about mighty achievements, urban redesign and bloody good music: look and listen for yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the stunning **Imperial War Museum North** (p560) in Manchester
- Walking in Roman footsteps around Chester's **city walls** (p568)
- Getting queasy on the rollercoasters at Blackpool's **Pleasure Beach** (p583)
- Exploring the **Isle of Man** (p585) – not just for tax-dodgers and petrol-heads
- Experiencing the simply marvellous **World Museum Liverpool** (p574)
- Catching the ferry across the **Mersey** (p582): hum the song while enjoying the best views of Liverpool

★ Isle of Man
Blackpool ★
Manchester ★
Liverpool ★
Chester ★

- POPULATION: 6.7 MILLION
- AREA: 5473 SQ MILES



NORTHWEST ENGLAND
0 20 km
0 12 miles
Lake District National Park
To Carlisle (35mi)
Tebay
Forest Hall
Ravenglass
Hawkshead
Windermere
Kendal
Sedbergh
Thwaite
Reeth
Hawes
Aysgarth
Newby Bridge
Dentdale
CUMBRIA
Yorkshire Dales National Park
NORTH YORKSHIRE
A595
M6
Ulverston
Grange-over-Sands
Arnside
Kirkby Lonsdale
Dalton-in-Furness
Barrow-in-Furness
To Douglas, Isle of Man (42mi) (See Inset)
Carnforth
Ingleton
A65
Horton-in-Ribblesdale
Stainforth
Settle
Malham
Grassington
Morecambe Bay
Morecambe
Heysham
Lancaster
LANCASHIRE
Long Preston
54°N
3°W
Forest of Bowland
Bolton Abbey
Skipton
Dunsop Bridge
Slaidburn
Newton
Gisburn
Ribble
A59
Irish Sea
Preesall
Fleetwood
Garstang
Whitewell
Sawley
Earby
Cleveleys
A6
Chipping
Waddington
Cross Hill
Keighley
Ribble Valley
Clitheroe
Pendle Hill (558m)
Colne
Hurst Green
Nelson
Haworth
Blackpool
Longridge
Whalley
Ribchester
BRADFORD
Kirkham
Padiham
Burnley
Preston
Warton
Blackburn
M65
Accrington
A646
Hebden Bridge
Halifax
Lytham St Anne's
Leyland
Darwen
Haslingden
Rawtenstall
Bacup
Todmorden
CALDERDALE
Southport
A565
Chorley
Ramsbottom
Littleborough
M6
M61
Rochdale
KIRKLEES
Bury
Ainsdale
SEFTON
Ormskirk
Bolton
Marsden
Formby
Farnworth
A62
Oldham
Wigan
Crosby
Leigh
Manchester
Kirkby
A580
Bootle
St Helens
Wallasey
M62
M60
Hyde
Glossop
Liverpool Bay
Liverpool
M57
Stockport
Hoylake
Birkenhead
Port Sunlight
Warrington
Altrincham
Mersey
Widnes
M56
Dee Estuary
Rhyl
Prestatyn
Heswall
M53
Speke
Liverpool Airport
Runcorn
Tatton Park
Wilmslow
Knutsford
Manchester Airport
Whaley Bridge
Holywell
Ellesmere Port
Frodsham
Northwich
Buxton
Flint
Macclesfield
A55
Queensferry
A556
Peak District National Park
Denbigh
Chester
Middlewich
Holmes Chapel
Mold
Winsford
Tarporley
WALES
CHESHIRE
Congleton
A523
A53
Ruthin
Sandbach
Leek
Broxton
Crewe
Wrexham
A41
Dee
Nantwich
Eglwyseg (511m)
M6
Stoke-on-Trent
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Audlem
Corwen
Llangollen
Whitchurch
STAFFORDSHIRE
To Douglas, Isle of Man (See Inset)
0 10 km
0 6 miles
Isle of Man
Irish Sea
Bride
Bellaugh
Ramsey
Isle of Man
Peel
Douglas
Port Erin
Castletown
54°N

Information

Discover England's Northwest (www.visitnorthwest.com) is the centralised tourist authority that covers the whole of the northwest.

Getting Around

The two main cities, Manchester and Liverpool, are only 34 miles apart and are linked by hourly bus and train services. Chester is only 18 miles south of Liverpool, but is also easily accessible from Manchester by train or via the M56 motorway. Blackpool is 50 miles to the north of both cities, and is also well connected. Try the following for transport information:

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (www.gmpte.com) For extensive info on Manchester and its environs.

Merseytravel (☎ 236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk) Taking care of all travel in Merseyside.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) Extensive coach services in the northwest; Manchester and Liverpool are major hubs.

MANCHESTER

☎ 0161 / pop 394,270

If ever London was to quit being capital – or was fired for some kind of terrible wrongdoing – Manchester would be a readymade substitute with the necessary wherewithal to take on the job. It's a modern metropolis embracing change like few others in Europe; it's where much of the best music of the last couple of decades came from; and it has the world's best-supported football team. Oh, and it likes to call itself the uncrowned capital of the north. Northern bluster? Sure, but it's surely more than just northern one-upmanship that Manchester looks past London to Barcelona to find its urban soul mate and inspiration.

Manchester knows all about improbable scenarios and has never shied away from dramatic responsibility. After all, this was the city that gave birth to capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, so what's a little self-inflating urban redesign to a burgh that knows a thing or two about altering the history of the world?

The change and influence of the last decade and a half has been nearly as dramatic. It began with a musical revolution, was interrupted by a bomb and has climaxed in the transformation of Manchester into the envy of any urban centre in Europe, a modern metropolis that has embraced 21st-century style and technology like no other in Britain.

Not only does Manchester have a wealth of fascinating museums that reflect its unique role in the pioneering developments of the Industrial Age, but it has managed to weave the mementos of its past with a forward-looking, ambitious programme of urban development that has already offered us a vision of what the future holds in store.

HISTORY

Canals and steam-powered cotton mills were how Manchester was transformed from a small disease-infested provincial town into a very big disease-infested industrial city. It all happened in the 1760s – with the opening of the Bridgewater Canal between Manchester and the coal mines at Worsley in 1763, and with Richard Arkwright patenting his super cotton mill in 1769. Thereafter, Manchester and the world would never be the same again. When the canal was extended to Liverpool and the open sea in 1776, Manchester – now dubbed 'Cottonopolis' – kicked into high gear and took off on the coal-fuelled, steam-powered gravy train.

There was plenty of gravy to go around, but the good burghers of 19th-century Manchester made sure that the vast majority of the city's swollen citizenry (1801, population 90,000; 100 years later, two million) who produced most of it never got their hands on any of it. Their reward was life in a new kind of urban settlement: the industrial slum. Working conditions were scarcely better: impossibly long hours, child labour, work-related accidents and fatalities were commonplace. Mark Twain commented that he would like to live here because the 'transition between Manchester and Death would be unnoticeable'. So much for Victorian values.

The wheels started to come off the train toward the end of the 19th century. The USA had begun to flex its own industrial muscles and was taking over a sizeable chunk of the textile trade; production in Manchester's mills began to slow down and then it stopped altogether. By WWII there was hardly enough cotton produced in the city to make a tablecloth. In 1996 an IRA bomb wrecked a chunk of the city centre, but from the wreckage sprung the glass-and-chrome revolution so much in evidence today.

ORIENTATION

All public transport converges at Piccadilly Gardens, just southeast of the cathedral. Directly north is the on-the-up boho Northern Quarter, with its offbeat boutiques, hip cafés and fabulous record shops. A few blocks southeast is the Gay Village, centred on Canal St, and, just next to it, Chinatown, basically a bunch of restaurants clustered around Portland St.

Southwest of the centre is Castlefield and Deansgate Locks, a supertrendy development that has successfully converted the 19th-century canalside industrial infrastructure into a groovy weekend playground for the city's fine young things. Further west again – and accessible via Metrolink – are the recently developed Salford Quays, home to the fab Lowry complex and the Imperial War Museum North. Not far away is the Old Trafford football stadium, where Manchester United's stars earn their keep.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Cornerhouse (☎ 200 1514; www.cornerhouse.org; 70 Oxford St) Art and film books, specialist magazines and kitschy cards.

Waterstone's Deansgate (☎ 832 1992); St Anne's Sq (☎ 837 3000)

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 436 3999)

Police station (☎ 872 5050; Bootle St)

Internet Access

Central Library (☎ 234 1982; St Peter's Sq; per 30min £1; 🕒 internet access 1-6pm Mon-Sat)

easyInternetcafé (8-10 Exchange St; per 30min £1; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

City Life (www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk) The city's evening paper in electronic form.

Mad For It (www.madforit.com) Restaurants, bars, clubs and other night-time activities using the Manchester clarion call: are you mad for it?

Real Manchester (www.realmanchester.com) Online guide to nightlife.

Virtual Manchester (www.manchester.com)

Visit Manchester (www.visitmanchester.com) The official website for Greater Manchester.

Medical Services

Cameolord Chemist (☎ 236 1445; St Peter's Sq; 🕒 10am-10pm)

Manchester Royal Infirmary (☎ 276 1234; Oxford Rd)

Post

Post office (Brazennose St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0871 222 8223; www.manchester.gov.uk; Town Hall Extension, St Peter's Sq; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Sells tickets for all sorts of guided walks, which operate almost daily year-round and cost adult/child £5/3.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

City Centre

The city's main administrative centre is the superb Victorian Gothic **town hall** (tours £4; 🕒 tours 2pm Sat Mar-Sep) that dominates Albert Sq. The interior is rich in sculpture and ornate decoration, while the exterior is crowned by an impressive 85m-high tower. You can visit the building on your own, but as it's the city's main administrative centre you won't get the same access as you do by organised tour, which departs from the tourist office.

Just behind the town hall, the elegant Roman Pantheon lookalike **Central Library** (☎ 234 1900; St Peter's Sq; admission free; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri & Sat) was built in 1934. It is the country's largest municipal library, with more than 20 miles of shelves.

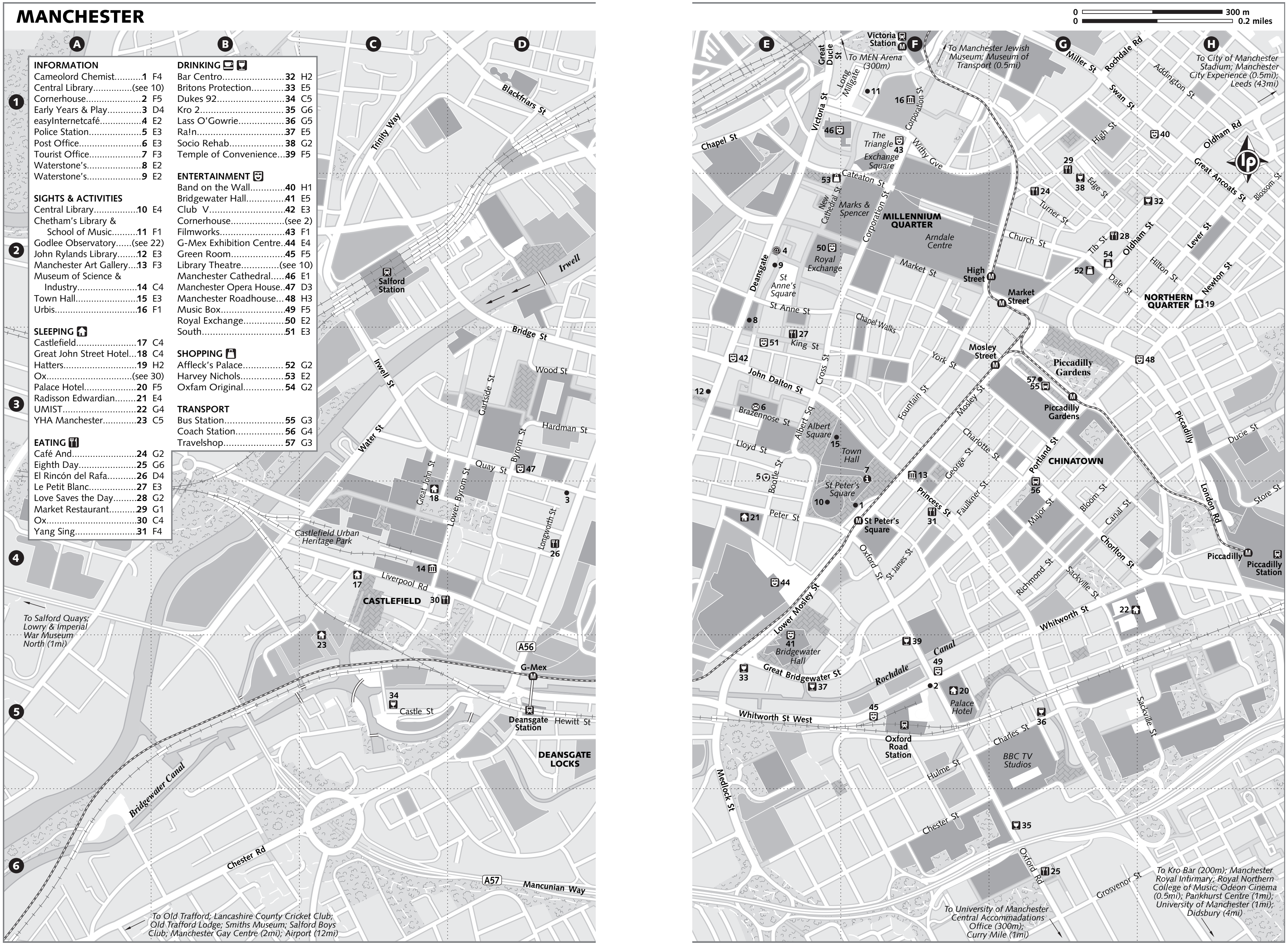
MANCHESTER ART GALLERY

A superb collection of British art and a hefty number of European masters are on display at the city's top **gallery** (☎ 235 8888; www.manchestergalleries.org; Mosley St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). The older wing, designed by Charles Barry (of Houses of Parliament fame) in 1834, has an impressive collection that includes 37 Turner watercolours, as well as the country's best collection of Pre-Raphaelite art. The new gallery features a permanent collection of 20th-century British art starring Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore and David Hockney.

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

An easy candidate for top building in town, this marvellous Victorian Gothic **library** (☎ 834 5343; 35 Deansgate) was one hell of a way for Rylands' widow to remember her husband John. It was slated to reopen by the middle of 2006 after a major renovation, but we were still tapping our feet at the end of that summer – call the library for the latest. Come on, people! It's been too long since we set foot inside Basil Champneys' breathtaking Reading Room,

MANCHESTER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Blackfriars St
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Quay St
Great John St
Lower Byrom St
Longworth St
Castlefield Urban Heritage Park
Liverpool Rd
CASTLEFIELD
To Salford Quays; Lowry & Imperial War Museum North (1mi)
A56
G-Mex
Castle St
Deansgate Station
Hewitt St
DEANSGATE LOCKS
Bridgewater Canal
Chester Rd
A57
Mancunian Way
To Old Trafford; Lancashire County Cricket Club; Old Trafford Lodge; Smiths Museum; Salford Boys Club; Manchester Gay Centre (2mi); Airport (12mi)
Victoria Station
Great Ducie St
To MEN Arena (300m)
Long Millgate
To Manchester Jewish Museum; Museum of Transport (0.5mi)
Miller St
Rochdale Rd
Swan St
Addington St
To City of Manchester Stadium; Manchester City Experience (0.5mi); Leeds (43mi)
Corporation St
Victoria St
Chapel St
The Triangle
Exchange Square
Withy Gve
Oldham Rd
Great Ancoats St
Blossom St
High St
Cateaton St
New Cathedral St
Marks & Spencer
MILLENNIUM QUARTER
Arndale Centre
Edge St
Turner St
Church St
Tib St
Oldham St
Lever St
Royal Exchange
Deansgate
St Anne's Square
Market St
High Street
Market Street
Hilton St
Dale St
Newton St
NORTHERN QUARTER
St Anne St
Chapel Walks
King St
Cross St
York St
Mosley Street
Piccadilly Gardens
John Dalton St
Brazennose St
Albert Sq
Albert Square
Fountain St
Mosley St
Lloyd St
Town Hall
Charlotte St
Portland St
CHINATOWN
Piccadilly
Ducie St
Bootle St
George St
St Peter's Square
Princess St
Faulkner St
Bloom St
Canal St
London Rd
Store St
Peter St
St Peter's Square
Major St
Chorlton St
Piccadilly
Piccadilly Station
Oxford St
St James St
Richmond St
Sackville St
Lower Mosley St
Whitworth St
Bridgewater Hall
Canal
Rochdale
Great Bridgewater St
Palace Hotel
Whitworth St West
Oxford Road Station
Charles St
BBC TV Studios
Sackville St
Medlock St
Hulme St
Chester St
Oxford Rd
Grosvenor St
To Kro Bar (200m); Manchester Royal Infirmary; Royal Northern College of Music; Odeon Cinema (0.5mi); Pankhurst Centre (1mi); University of Manchester (1mi); Didsbury (4mi)
To University of Manchester Central Accommadations Office (300m); Curry Mile (1mi)

INFORMATION

Cameolord Chemist	1	F4
Central Library	(see 10)	
Cornerhouse	2	F5
Early Years & Play	3	D4
easyInternetcafé	4	E2
Police Station	5	E3
Post Office	6	E3
Tourist Office	7	F3
Waterstone's	8	E2
Waterstone's	9	E2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Central Library	10	E4
Chetham's Library & School of Music	11	F1
Godlee Observatory	(see 22)	
John Rylands Library	12	E3
Manchester Art Gallery	13	F3
Museum of Science & Industry	14	C4
Town Hall	15	E3
Urbis	16	F1

SLEEPING

Castlefield	17	C4
Great John Street Hotel	18	C4
Hatters	19	H2
Ox	(see 30)	
Palace Hotel	20	F5
Radisson Edwardian	21	E4
UMIST	22	G4
YHA Manchester	23	C5

EATING

Café And	24	G2
Eighth Day	25	G6
El Rincón del Rafa	26	D4
Le Petit Blanc	27	E3
Love Saves the Day	28	G2
Market Restaurant	29	G1
Ox	30	C4
Yang Sing	31	F4

DRINKING

Bar Centro	32	H2
Britons Protection	33	E5
Dukes 92	34	C5
Kro 2	35	G6
Lass O'Gowrie	36	G5
Ra!n	37	E5
Socio Rehab	38	G2
Temple of Convenience	39	F5

ENTERTAINMENT

Band on the Wall	40	H1
Bridgewater Hall	41	E5
Club V	42	E3
Cornerhouse	(see 2)	
Filmworks	43	F1
G-Mex Exhibition Centre	44	E4
Green Room	45	F5
Library Theatre	(see 10)	
Manchester Cathedral	46	E1
Manchester Opera House	47	D3
Manchester Roadhouse	48	H3
Music Box	49	F5
Royal Exchange	50	E2
South	51	E3

SHOPPING

Affleck's Palace	52	G2
Harvey Nichols	53	E2
Oxfam Original	54	G2

TRANSPORT

Bus Station	55	G3
Coach Station	56	G4
Travelshop	57	G3

MANCHESTER IN…

Two Days

After you've explored the glorious trophies of the Industrial Age around **Albert Square** (p557), hop on a tram and get down to Salford Quays and its trio of top attractions: the **Imperial War Museum North** (below), the **Lowry** (opposite) and then the **Manchester United Museum** (opposite). Pick a restaurant – **Yang Sing** (p564) will do to kick off the evening – then find a bar and round the night off in a club. The next day, head towards **Castlefield Urban Heritage Park** (below) before indulging in a spot of retail therapy around the **Millennium Quarter** (p567), breaking up the spendfest with a visit to **Urbis** (below). Venture east and go alternative in the boutiques and offbeat shops of the **Northern Quarter** (p567).

Four Days

Spread the two-day itinerary over three days, including a whole day devoted to the Salford Quays; spend more time perusing the city's excellent shopping districts before examining the riches of the **Manchester Art Gallery** (p557).

designed to look like a monastic library, or had the chance to gawk at the stunning collection of early printed books and rare manuscripts. Hey, some folks just *love* books!

URBIS

The stunning glass triangle that is **Urbis** (☎ 907 9099; www.urbis.org.uk; City Park, Corporation St; admission free to levels 2-4, charge varies for temporary exhibits; 🕐 10am-6pm Sun-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu-Sat) is a museum about how a city works and – often – doesn't work. The walls of the three floors are covered in compelling photographs, interesting statistics and informative timelines, but the best parts are the interactive videos, which tell stories about real people from radically different backgrounds and how they fare in Manchester. It's all well and good to theorise, but there's nothing like a real story to hammer home the truth. Homelessness, rootlessness and dislocation are major themes of urban living, and Urbis doesn't shy away from encouraging visitors to consider what it's like to sleep on a park bench.

CHETHAM'S LIBRARY & SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Beautiful **Chetham's** (☎ 834 7861; www.chethams.org.uk; Long Millgate; admission free; 🕐 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) is the city's oldest complete structure (1421). It wouldn't be half as interesting were it not for the fact that during the mid-19th century two of its regular users were Messrs Marx and Engels, whose favourite seats were by the large bay window in the main reading room.

Castlefield Urban Heritage Park

The heart of 19th-century industrial Manchester, a landscape of enormous, weather-stained brick buildings and rusting cast-iron relics of canals, viaducts, bridges, warehouses and market buildings, Castlefield has been successfully transformed into an interesting heritage park. Aside from the huge science museum, the big draw here is the Castlefield Basin. The Bridgewater Canal runs through it; in summertime thousands of people amble about the place and patronise its fine pubs and trendy restaurants.

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

The city's largest **museum** (☎ 832 1830; www.msim.org.uk; Liverpool Rd; admission free, charge varies for special exhibitions; 🕐 10am-5pm) comprises 2.8 hectares spread about two huge Victorian warehouses and the world's oldest passenger railway terminal. If there's anything you want to know about the Industrial (and postindustrial) Revolution and Manchester's key role in it, you'll find it among the collection of steam engines and locomotives, factory machinery from the mills, and the excellent exhibition telling the story of Manchester from the sewers up.

Salford Quays

West of the city, three major attractions draw in the punters, and a shopping centre makes sure they have outlets to spend their money. It's a cinch to get there from the city centre via Metrolink (£1.80); for the Imperial War Museum North and the Lowry look for the Harbour City stop.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM NORTH

War museums generally appeal to those with a fascination for military hardware and battle strategy (toy soldiers optional), but Daniel Libeskind's visually stunning **Imperial War Museum North** (☎ 836 4000; www.iwm.org.uk/north; Trafford Wharf Rd; admission free; 🕐 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) takes a radically different approach. War is hell, it tells us, but it's a hell we revisit with tragic regularity.

Although the audiovisuals and displays are quite compelling, the extraordinary aluminium-clad building itself is a huge part of the attraction, and the exhibition spaces are genuinely breathtaking. Libeskind designed three separate-but-linked structures, or shards, that represent the three main theatres of war: air, land and sea.

LOWRY

Directly across the canal from the war museum is a futuristic ship in permanent dock. No, not really, but the **Lowry** (☎ 876 2020; www.thelowry.com; Pier 8, Salford Quays; 🕐 11am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun & Mon) looks a bit like one. It caused quite a stir when it opened in 2000, but has proved an unqualified success, attracting more than a million visitors a year.

The complex is named after one of England's favourite artists, LS Lowry, who is mostly noted for his industrial landscapes and impressions of northern towns. The Lowry contains more than 300 of his paintings and drawings. It also encapsulates two theatres (see p566), galleries, shops, restaurants and bars.

OLD TRAFFORD (MANCHESTER UNITED MUSEUM & TOUR)

Here's a paradox: the world's most famous and supported football club, beloved of fans from Bangkok to Buenos Aires, is the most hated club in England and has a smaller fan base in Manchester than its far less successful cross-town rivals, Manchester City. United fans snigger and dismiss this as small-minded jealousy, while treating the **Old Trafford stadium** (www.manutd.com; Sir Matt Busby Way; 🕐 9.30am-5pm) like holy ground and the stars that play there like minor deities. Such arrogance is enough to turn the rest of us into ABUs (Anyone But United) and cheer the fact that it's been a few years since Fergie's boys have won a championship (even though Chelsea's dominance is just as irritating, heralding the arrival of ABCs).

But there's no denying that a visit to the stadium is one of the more memorable things you'll do here. We strongly recommend that you take the **tour** (☎ 0870 442 1994; adult/child £9/6; 🕐 every 10min 9.40am-4.30pm except match days), which includes a seat in the stands, a stop in the changing rooms, a peek at the players' lounge (from which the manager is banned unless invited by the players) and a walk down the tunnel to the pitchside dugout, which is as close to ecstasy as many of the club's fans will ever get. It's pretty impressive stuff. The **museum** (adult/child £5.50/3.75; 🕐 9.30am-5pm), which is part of the tour but can be visited independently, has a comprehensive history of the club and a state-of-the-art call-up system so you can view your favourite goals.

MANCHESTER FOR CHILDREN

Urbis (opposite) is always full of kids who find the interactive displays quite engaging, and Castlefield Urban Heritage Park (opposite) is the perfect all-day destination, offering a host of different activities and exhibits suited to

MORE MUSEUMS

If you can't get enough of annotated exhibits, Manchester has a number of other museums worth checking out.

The **Manchester Jewish Museum** (☎ 834 9879; www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com; 190 Cheetham Hill Rd; adult/child £2.50/1.75; 🕐 10.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Sun), in a Moorish-style former synagogue, tells the story of the city's Jewish community in fascinating detail, including the story of Polish refugee Michael Marks, who opened his first shop with partner Tom Spencer at 20 Cheetham Hill Rd in 1894. From Piccadilly Gardens, take bus 59, 89, 135 or 167.

Nearby, the wonderful **Museum of Transport** (☎ 205 2122; www.gmts.co.uk; Boyle St, Cheetham Hill; adult/child £4/2; 🕐 10am-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun) is packed with old buses, fire engines and lorries built in the last 100 years.

The **Pankhurst Centre** (☎ 273 5673; www.pankhurstcentre.org.uk; 60-62 Nelson St; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is the converted childhood home of Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), a leading light of the British suffragette movement. It has displays on her remarkable life and political struggles.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Maybe it's the vertiginous spiral staircase, but hardly anyone ever visits the fabulous **Godlee Observatory** (☎ 200 4977; www.manastro.co.uk; fl G, Sackville Bldg, UMIST, Sackville St; admission free; 🕒 by appointment only), one of the most interesting places in town. Built in 1902, it is a fully functioning observatory with its original Grubb telescope in place; even the rope and wheels that move the telescope are original. Not only can you glimpse the heavens (if the weather allows), but the views of the city from the balcony are exceptional. It's located at University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

younger visitors. Manchester United's ground Old Trafford (p561) is always popular with fans, who are getting younger and younger, while the Imperial War Museum North (p560) is designed to engage the interest of kids barely into double figures with its themes based on war not being a bunch of laughs.

City Life Kids (£4), available at the tourist office and all bookshops in the city, is a comprehensive guide to virtually every aspect of family-oriented Manchester.

If you're looking for some free time away from the kids, **Early Years & Play** (☎ 234 7117; Overseas House, Quay St) is a city-centre crèche.

QUIRKY MANCHESTER

You don't have to work too hard to find oddity in Manchester: spend enough time on Piccadilly Circus and you'll know what we mean. However, for a different (and altogether fabulous) view of the city, climb to the parapet of the Godlee Observatory (see the boxed text, above), a place virtually nobody visits. It's a far cry from the alternative circus that is Affleck's Palace (p567), where in order to go unnoticed it's best if you look like Marilyn Manson or a really scruffy Kurt Cobain.

When you're done, you'll have to unwind with a pint in the Temple of Convenience (p564), a tiny basement pub with a terrific atmosphere located in…a former public toilet.

SLEEPING

Designer digs and business hotels are the mainstay of the city's accommodations. Remember that during the football season (August to May), rooms can be almost impossible to find if Manchester United is playing at home. If you are having difficulty finding a bed, the tourist office's accommodation service (£3) can help.

City Centre

BUDGET

University of Manchester/University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology (UMIST) (☎ 275 2888; Central Accommodations Office, Precinct Centre, Oxford Rd; dm/d from £11/26; 🕒 Jun-Sep) With more than 9000 beds in a variety of rooms, from traditional residence halls to smart, modern flats spread throughout the campuses and suburbs, the university does a roaring summer trade. Call the office (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) for details and bookings.

Hatters (☎ 236 9500; www.hattersgroup.com; 50 Newton St; dm/s/d/tr from £15.50/27.50/50/68; 🅿 💻 ♿) The old-style lift and porcelain sinks are the only leftovers of this former milliner's factory, now one of the best hostels in town, with location to boot. Smack in the heart of the Northern Quarter, you won't have to go far to get the best of alternative Manchester.

YHA Manchester (☎ 839 9960; www.yha.org.uk; Potato Wharf; dm incl breakfast £20.95; 🅿 💻 ♿) This purpose-built canalside hostel in the Castlefield area is one of the best hostels in the country. It's a top-class facility with four- and six-bed dorms, all with en suite, and a host of good facilities.

MIDRANGE

Castlefield (☎ 832 7073; www.castlefield-hotel.co.uk; 3 Liverpool Rd; s/d from £45/80; 🅿 🏊) This is another successful warehouse conversion that has resulted in a thoroughly modern business hotel overlooking the canal basin. It has spacious, comfortable rooms and excellent amenities, including a fitness centre and pool that are free to guests.

Ox (☎ 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; r £50) Not quite your traditional B&B (breakfast is extra), but an excellent choice nonetheless: nine oxblood-red rooms with tidy amenities above a fine gastropub (see opposite) in the heart of Castlefield. It's the best deal in town for the location.

TOP END

Palace Hotel (☎ 288 1111; www.principal-hotels.com; Oxford St; r from £80) An elegant refurbishment of one of Manchester's most magnificent Victorian palaces has resulted in a pretty special boutique hotel, combining the grandeur of the public areas with the modern look of the bedrooms.

Radisson Edwardian (☎ 835 9929; www.radissonedwardian.com/manchester; Peter St; r from £100; 🅿 🏊 ♿) The Free Trade Hall saw it all, from Emmeline Pankhurst's suffragette campaign to the Sex Pistols' legendary 1976 gig. Today, those rabble-rousing noisemakers wouldn't be allowed to set foot in the door of what is now a sumptuous five-star hotel, all minimalist Zen and luxury; unless of course they were *famous* rabble-rousing noisemakers, and then they would probably be headed straight for one of the four penthouse suites, one of which is named after Bob Dylan, who went electric at the Free Trade Hall in 1965.

Great John Street Hotel (☎ 831 3211; www.greatjohnstreet.co.uk; Great John St; r £235-450; 💻 🏊) Elegant, designer luxury? Present. Fabulous rooms with all the usual delights (Egyptian cotton sheets, fabulous toiletries, free-standing baths and lots of hi-tech electronics)? Present. A butler to run your bath in the grandest rooms? Present. It's all pretty swanky in Manchester's newest boutique hotel, a converted schoolhouse (ah, now we get it) just across the street from Granada TV studios. A rare treat: the rooftop garden has a hot tub and views of the *Coronation Street* set. Now that's something you don't see every day.

Salford Quays

Old Trafford Lodge (☎ 874 3333; www.lccc.co.uk; Talbot Rd; r Mon-Fri/Sat & Sun from £59/88) Cricket fans will salivate at the thought of watching a first-class match from the comfort of their bedroom balcony; for the rest of us, this is a pretty good business hotel with decent amenities.

Lowry (☎ 827 4000; www.rfhotels.com; 50 Dearman's Pl, Chapel Wharf; s/d from £85/130) Simply dripping with designer luxury and five-star comfort, Manchester's top hotel has fabulous rooms with enormous beds, ergonomically designed furniture, walk-in wardrobes and bathrooms finished in Italian porcelain tiles and glass mosaic. You can soothe yourself with a skin-brightening treatment or an aromatherapy head massage at the health spa.

EATING

Only London can outdo Manchester for the choice of cafés and restaurants. There's literally something for every palate, from the ubiquitous-but-excellent selections in Chinatown to Wilmslow Rd (the extension of Oxford St/Rd), aka the Curry Mile, with its unsurpassed concentration of Indian and Pakistani eateries. Organic is the order of the day in the Northern Quarter (where you'll also find some excellent veggie spots), while the city's fancy fare is spread pretty much all over. Many bars and pubs also do food. Below is but a small starter course.

BUDGET

Café And (☎ 834 1136; 74-76 High St; sandwiches £3; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun) A trendy café, hip record store, contemporary art gallery and retro furniture shop all in one, this is your one stop for everything you might possibly need in the Northern Quarter. The toasties and wraps are delicious, but it's the excellent organic soups that kept us coming back for more.

Eighth Day (☎ 273 4878; 111 Oxford Rd; mains around £4; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) New and definitely improved after a major cleanup, this environment-friendly hang-out is a favourite with students and sells everything to make you feel good about your place in the world, from Fairtrade teas to homeopathic remedies. The vegetarian- and vegan-friendly menu is substantial.

Love Saves the Day (☎ 832 0777; Tib St) The Northern Quarter's most popular café is a New York–style deli, small supermarket and sit-down eatery in one large, airy room. Everybody comes here – from crusties to corporate types – to sit around over a spot of lunch and discuss the day's goings-on. A wonderful spot. The house salad is £5.

MIDRANGE

Ox (☎ 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; mains £9-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Manchester's only gastropub has elevated boozer-dining to a whole new level and earned plenty of kudos in the process. The Brit *nouvelle cuisine* – how about an oven-roasted T-bone steak with tempura onion rings, beefsteak tomatoes and

TOP FIVE PUBS FOR A PINT

- Albion (p571; Chester)
- Britons Protection (p564; Manchester)
- Hannah's (p579; Liverpool)
- Philharmonic (p579; Liverpool)
- Temple of Convenience (p564; Manchester)

Portobello mushrooms – is complemented by an almost exclusively Australian wine list.

El Rincón del Rafa (☎ 839 8819; Longworth St; mains £9-13; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Descend the steps into this basement restaurant and find yourself in a little corner of Spain, complete with mouth-watering tapas, posters depicting bullfighting and the kind of buzz more in keeping with Madrid than Manchester. It's always packed so book ahead.

Yang Sing (☎ 236 2200; 34 Princess St; mains £9-16; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A serious contender for best Chinese restaurant in Britain, Yang Sing attracts diners from all over with its exceptional Cantonese cuisine. From a dim-sum lunch to a full evening banquet the food is superb, and the waiters will patiently explain the intricacies of each item to punters who can barely pronounce the dishes' names.

Le Petit Blanc (☎ 832 1000; www.lepetitblanc.co.uk; 55 King St; mains £9-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Top chef Raymond Blanc brings his winning formula of French cuisine with world influences (Asian primarily, but lots of English touches) to Manchester with some style and plenty of success.

Market Restaurant (☎ 834 3743; www.market-restaurant.com; 104 High St; mains £10-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner Wed-Fri, dinner Sat) Excellent British cuisine is on the menu at this Northern Quarter restaurant – and it changes every month or so to take account of the season's best. It ain't especially pretty, but it's very good.

DRINKING

There's every kind of drinking hole in Manchester, from the really grungy ones that smell but have plenty of character, to the ones that were designed by a team of architects but have the atmosphere of a freezer. Every neighbourhood in town has its favourites; below we list a mere handful.

Bars

Bar Centro (☎ 835 2863; 72-74 Tib St) A Northern Quarter stalwart, very popular with the bohemian crowd precisely because it doesn't try to be. Great beer, nice staff and a better-than-average bar menu (mains £5 to £8) make this one of the choice spots in the area.

Kro Bar (☎ 274 3100; www.kro.co.uk; 325 Oxford Rd) The ice-cool hand of Scandinavian design is all over this terrific bar in the middle of student-land. An excellent bar menu (mains £7 to £9) packs the punters in at lunch, while DJs keep it going at night until closing. Sandwiches are £2.50.

Kro 2 (☎ 236 1048; Oxford House, Oxford Rd) Kro Bar's younger brother is next to the BBC. It's closer to the city but not quite as classy as the original.

Ra!n (☎ 235 6500; 80 Great Bridgewater St) A rival to Dukes 92 for best outdoor drinking, indoors Ra!n is both trendy new-style bar and old-fashioned boozer. Whatever your mood, you'll find the right ambience in this former umbrella factory.

Socio Rehab (☎ 757 3422; Edge St) Tiny, supercool and boasting one of the best cocktail menus in town, this terrific bar is the kind that will make you think you're onto a really good secret. You kind of are.

Temple of Convenience (☎ 288 9834; Great Bridgewater St) This tiny basement bar with a capacity of about 30 has a great jukebox and a fine selection of spirits, all crammed into a converted public toilet. Hardly your bog-standard pub.

Pubs

Lass O'Gowrie (☎ 273 6932; 36 Charles St) A Victorian classic off Princess St that brews its own beer in the basement. It's a favourite with students, old-timers and a clique of BBC employees who work just across the street in the Beeb's Manchester HQ. It also does good-value bar meals (mains around £6).

Britons Protection (☎ 236 5895; 50 Great Bridgewater St) Whisky – 200 different kinds of it – is the beverage of choice at this liver-threatening, proper English pub that also does Tudor-style meals (boar, venison and the like; mains around £7). An old-fashioned boozer, no fancy stuff.

Dukes 92 (☎ 839 8646; 2 Castle St) Castlefield's best pub, housed in converted stables that once belonged to the duke of Bridgewater, has comfy, deep sofas inside and plenty of seating outside, overlooking lock 92 of the Rochdale Canal – hence the name. If it's sunny, there's no better spot to enjoy a pint of ale.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightclubs

Madchester is dead, long live Madchester. The city has a terrific club scene and it remains at the vanguard of the culture of the dance floor. There's a forever-changing mixture of club nights, so check the *Manchester Evening News* for details of what's on. These are our favourites.

Music Box (☎ 236 9971; www.themusicbox.info; 65 Oxford St; admission £6-12; 🕑 Wed-Sat) Deep in Jilly's Rockworld complex you'll find our favourite club in town and – judging by the queues – almost everyone else's, too. The punters come for the superb monthly club nights, such as Mr Scruff's Keep it Unreal, as well a host of terrific one-offs.

GAY & LESBIAN MANCHESTER

The city's gay scene is unsurpassed outside London, and caters to every taste. The useful *Gay & Lesbian Village Guide,* available from the tourist office, lists numerous gay bars, clubs, galleries and groups. It also runs the **Lesbian & Gay Heritage Trail** (£5; 🕑 3pm 1st Sun of month), a 90-minute walking tour of the city's pink links, some of which date back to the early 1800s. For other information, check with the **Manchester Gay Centre** (☎ 274 3814; Sydney St, Salford) and the **Lesbian & Gay Foundation** (☎ 235 8035; www.lgf.org.uk; 🕑 4-10pm). The city's best pink website is www.visitgaymanchester.co.uk.

At the heart of it all is the Gay Village, centred on gorgeous Canal St. Here you will find bars, clubs, restaurants and hotels that cater almost exclusively to the pink pound.

The country's biggest gay and lesbian arts festival, **Queer Up North** (IQUP; ☎ 833 2288; www.queerupnorth.com), takes place every two years – the next in spring 2007. **Manchester Pride** (☎ 0870 166 0434; www.manchesterpride.com) is a 10-day festival in the middle of August each year and attracts more than 500,000 people.

Club V (☎ 834 9975; 111 Deansgate; admission £5; 🕑 Fri & Sat) White leather sofas and club nights with names like Angel Deelite and Venus don't always augur well if you're looking for some really good music, but this little basement club defies all expectations with its devotion to garage and funky house.

South (☎ 831 7756; www.south-club.co.uk; 4a South King St; admission £5-6; 🕑 Fri & Sat) An excellent basement club to kick off the weekend: Friday night is Rock'n'Roll Bar, featuring everything from Ibrahim Ferrer to Northern Soul; and Saturday is Disco Rescue, which is more of the same eclectic mix of alternative and dance.

Cinemas

Cornerhouse (☎ 228 2463; www.cornerhouse.org; 70 Oxford St) Your only destination for good art-house releases; also has a gallery, bookshop and café.

Filmworks (☎ 0870 010 2030; www.thefilmworks.co.uk; Printworks, Exchange Sq) Ultramodern 20-screen complex in the middle of the Printworks centre; there's also an IMAX theatre.

Odeon Cinema (☎ 0870 505 0007; www.odeon.co.uk; 1 Oxford Rd) Chain cinema that shows only mainstream releases on its seven screens.

Theatre

Green Room (☎ 236 1677; 54 Whitworth St W) The premiere fringe venue in town.

Manchester Opera House (☎ 242 2509; www.manchestertheatres.co.uk; Quay St) West End shows and lavish musicals make up the bulk of the programme.

Library Theatre (☎ 236 7110; Central Library, St Peter's Sq) Old plays and new work in a small theatre beneath the Central Library.

Royal Exchange (☎ 833 9833; St Anne's Sq) Interesting contemporary plays are standard at this magnificent, modern theatre-in-the-round.

Live Music

ROCK MUSIC

Band on the Wall (☎ 834 1786; www.bandonthewall.org; 25 Swan St) A top-notch venue that hosts everything from rock to world music, with splashes of jazz, blues and folk thrown in for good measure.

G-Mex Exhibition Centre (☎ 834 2700; www.gmex-micc.co.uk) A midsize venue that hosts rock concerts by not-quite-supersuccessful bands as well as exhibitions and indoor sporting events.

Manchester Roadhouse (☎ 228 1789; www.theroadhouselive.co.uk; 8-10 Newton St) Local bands are put through their paces in front of what is usually an enthusiastic crowd.

MEN Arena (☎ 950 5000; Great Ducie St) Giant arena that hosts large-scale rock concerts (as well as being the home of the city's ice-hockey and basketball teams).

TOP FIVE MANCHESTER ALBUMS

- *Permanent* Joy Division
- *Pills Thrills & Bellyaches* Happy Mondays
- *Some Friendly* Charlatans
- *Stone Roses* The Stone Roses
- *Strangeways Here We Come* The Smiths

THE MADCHESTER SOUND

It is often claimed that Manchester is the engine room of British pop. If this is indeed the case, then the chief engineer was TV presenter and music impresario Tony Wilson, founder of Factory Records – the label that in 1983 released New Order's ground-breaking 'Blue Monday', to this day the best-selling 12in in British history.

With the cash, Wilson opened the now-legendary Haçienda, which really took off when it embraced the new sound coming out of Chicago and Detroit: house. DJs Mike Pickering, Graeme Park and Jon Da Silva were the music's most important apostles, and when ecstasy hit the scene late in the decade, it seemed that every kid in town was 'mad for it'.

Heavily influenced by these new arrivals, the city's guitar bands took notice and began shaping their sounds to suit the clubbers' needs. The most successful was the Stone Roses, who in 1989 released 'Fools Gold', a pulsating hit with the rapid shuffle of James Brown's 'Funky Drummer' and a druggie guitar sound that drove dancers wild. Around the same time the Happy Mondays hit the scene with the infectious 'Hallelujah'. The party known as Madchester was officially opened.

It was over by 1992. Overdanced and overdrugged, the city woke up with a terrible hangover. The Haçienda went bust, the Happy Mondays went nuts and the Stone Roses eventually fell apart. The fertile crossover scene virtually disappeared and the two genres withdrew into a more familiar isolation. And then Oasis hit the scene.

They may have been Manchester's most successful ever band – and authors of a catchy tune or two – but Oasis' almost total debt to the Beatles' chord structures and melody lines, as well as the tiresome posturing of the Gallagher brothers, resulted in their inability to establish themselves as anything other than a super-successful flash-in-the-pan. They may have their millions, but give us Morrissey, Maher and co any day of the week.

Today, there is no such thing as Madchester. Eager to transcend the clichés that their success engendered, most of the city's musical talents refuse to be labelled as having any particular sound: jazzy house giant Mr Scruff (whose excellent Keep it Unreal nights are yours for the dancing at Music Box; see p564), for instance, doesn't sound anything like the folksy guitar style of Badly Drawn Boy or the funky hip-hop beats of Rae & Christian.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Bridgewater Hall (☎ 907 9000; www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk; Lower Mosley St) The world-renowned Hallé Orchestra has its home at this enormous and impressive concert hall, which hosts up to 250 concerts and events a year, with a widespread programme that includes opera, folk music, children's shows, comedy and contemporary music.

Lowry (☎ 876 2000; www.thelowry.com; Pier 8, Salford Quays) Two theatres – the 1750-capacity Lyric and 460-capacity Quays – host a diverse range of performances, from dance to comedy.

Manchester Cathedral (☎ 833 2220; Victoria St) Hosts a summer season of concerts by the Cantata Choir and ensemble groups.

Royal Northern College of Music (☎ 907 5555; www.rncm.ac.uk; 124 Oxford Rd) Presents a full programme of extremely high-quality classical music and other contemporary offerings.

Sport

For most people, Manchester plus sport equals football, and football means Manchester United. That may be true everywhere else (which is why United are covered in the Sights & Activities section, p561) but not here in Manchester. Like all good northerners, most Mancunians are more comfortable supporting the scrappy underdog with the huge heart rather than the well-oiled football machine.

MANCHESTER CITY

Manchester's best-loved team is the perennial underachiever, Manchester City. In 2003 the team moved to the spanking-new **City of Manchester Stadium** (Sportcity, Rowsley St). Here you can enjoy the **Manchester City Experience** (☎ 0870 062 1894; www.mcfc.co.uk; adult/child £8.75/4.75; ⏰ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun), a tour of the ground, dressing rooms and museum before inevitably being steered into the kit shop. Tours must be booked in advance.

LANCASHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Cricket is a big deal here, and the **Lancashire club** (☎ 282 4000; Warwick Rd), founded in 1816 as the Aurora before changing its name in 1864, is one of the most beloved of all England's county teams, despite not having won the county championship since 1930. The really big match in Lancashire's calendar is the Roses match against Yorkshire, but if you're not around for that one, the other games in the county season (admission £10 to £15) are a great day out. The season runs throughout the summer.

International test matches, recently starring local hero Andrew 'Freddie' Flintoff, are also played here occasionally.

SHOPPING

The huge selection of shops here will send a shopper's pulse into orbit; every taste and budget is catered for.

Millennium Quarter

The area around New Cathedral St, Exchange Sq and the impressive Triangle shopping arcade is the hot new shopping district, full of chichi boutiques and the king of all department stores, **Harvey Nichols** (☎ 828 8888; 21 New Cathedral St).

Northern Quarter

Rag-trade wholesalers have given way to independent retailers stocking all manner of hip urban wear, retro fashions and other left-of-centre threads.

Affleck's Palace (Oldham St), At the heart of the Northern Quarter, this is a four-storey warehouse full of outlets that Manchester's teenage Goths and the rest of the gloomerati have turned into a social day out.

The rest of the neighbourhood is full of great shops, including the marvellous **Oxfam Original** (☎ 839 3160; Unit 8, Smithfield Bldg, Oldham St), which has terrific retro gear from the 1960s and '70s.

West End

Everything needs a catchy name, so the traditionally upmarket shopping area around St Anne's Sq, King St and Bridge St – full of attractive boutiques for designers, both home grown and international – is now called the West End.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Manchester Airport (☎ 489 3000; www.manchesterairport.co.uk) is the largest airport outside London; it's served by 17 locations throughout Britain.

Bus

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) serves most major cities almost hourly from Chorlton St coach station in the city centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£5.80, 1¼ hours, hourly), Leeds (£7.80, one hour, hourly) and London (£21, 4¾ hours, hourly).

Train

Manchester Piccadilly is the main station for trains to and from the rest of the country, although Victoria station serves Halifax and Bradford. The two stations are linked by Metrolink. Trains head to Blackpool (£11.75, 1¼ hours, half-hourly), Liverpool Lime St (£8.30, 45 minutes, half-hourly), Newcastle (£40.70, three hours, six daily) and London (£101, three hours, seven daily).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

The airport is 12 miles south of the city. A train to or from Victoria station costs £3.40, and a coach £3.

Public Transport

The excellent public transport system can be used with a variety of Day Saver tickets (bus £3.50; bus and train £4.50; bus and Metrolink £5; train and Metrolink £5.50; bus, train and Metrolink £7). For inquiries about local transport, including night buses, contact **Travelshop** (☎ 228 7811; www.gmpte.com; 9 Portland St, Piccadilly Gardens; ⏰ 8am-8pm).

BUS

Centreline bus 4 provides a free service around the heart of Manchester every 10 minutes. You can pick up a route map from the tourist office. Most local buses start from Piccadilly Gardens.

METROLINK

There are frequent **Metrolink** (☎ 205 2000; www.metrolink.co.uk) trams between Victoria and Piccadilly train stations and G-Mex (for Castlefield) as well as further afield to Salford Quays. Buy your tickets from the platform machine.

TRAIN

Castlefield is served by Deansgate station with rail links to Piccadilly, Oxford Rd and Salford stations.

CHESHIRE

The favourite county of residence for the soccerati millionaires of Manchester and Liverpool, largely agricultural Cheshire is a very black-and-white kind of place – if you focus on the genuine half-timbered Tudor farmhouses and the Friesian cows that graze in the fields around them. It's a little bit of ye olde Englande, which is probably why so many footballers choose to live in the mansions and monstrosities behind the top-grade security gates: nothing gives the illusion of good taste like a bit of bling and tradition. For the rest of us, however, handsome, gentle Cheshire is mostly about Chester.

CHESTER

☎ 01244 / pop 80,130

Marvellous Chester is one of English history's greatest gifts to the contemporary visitor. Its red-sandstone wall giftwraps a tidy collection of Tudor and Victorian buildings originally built during Roman times when it was Castra Devana, the largest Roman fortress in Britain.

It's hard to believe it today, but throughout the Middle Ages Chester made its money as the most important port in the northwest, but the River Dee silted up over time and Chester fell behind Liverpool in importance.

Besides its obvious elegance and grace, Chester ekes out a fairly substantial living as a major retail centre and tourist hot spot: visitors come, see and shop.

Orientation

Most places of interest are inside the walls where the Roman street pattern is relatively intact. From the Cross (the stone pillar which marks the town centre), four roads fan out to the four principal gates.

Information

Cheshire Constabulary (☎ 350000; Castle Esplanade)

Chester Royal Infirmary (☎ 365000; St Martin's Way)

Chester Visitors' Centre (☎ 351609; www.visitchester.com; Vicar's Lane; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr)

i-station (☎ 401680; Rufus Ct; net access per 30min £1)

Post office (2 St John St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 402111; www.chester.gov.uk; Northgate St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr)

Sights & Activities

CITY WALLS

A good way to get a sense of Chester's unique character is to walk the 2-mile circuit along the walls that surround the historic centre. Originally built by the Romans around AD 70, the walls were altered substantially over the following centuries but have retained their current position since around 1200.

Of the many features along the walls, the most eye-catching is the prominent **Eastgate**, where you can see the most famous **clock** in Britain after London's Big Ben, built for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

At the southeastern corner of the walls are the **wishing steps**, added in 1785; local legend claims that if you can run up and down these uneven steps while holding your breath your wish will come true. We question the veracity of this claim because our wish was not a twisted ankle.

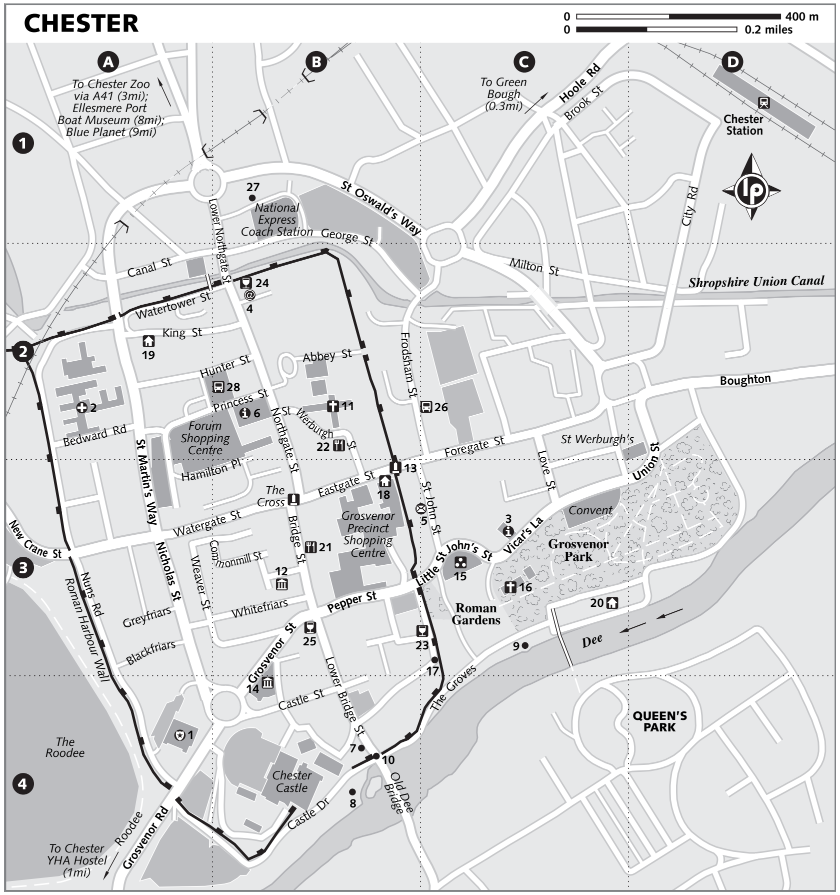
Just inside Southgate, known here as **Bridgegate** (as it's at the northern end of the Old Dee Bridge), is the 1664 **Bear & Billet** pub, Chester's oldest timber-framed building and once a tollgate into the city.

THE ROWS

Chester's other great draw is the **Rows**, a series of two-level galleried arcades along the four streets that fan out in each direction from the central Cross. The architecture is a handsome mix of Victorian and Tudor (original and mock) buildings that house a fantastic collection of individually owned shops. The origin of the Rows is a little unclear, but it is believed that as the Roman walls slowly crumbled, medieval traders built their shops against the resulting rubble banks, while later arrivals built theirs on top.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **cathedral** (☎ 324756; Northgate St; www.chestercathedral.com; adult/child £4/1.50; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) was a Benedictine abbey built on the remains of an earlier Saxon church dedicated to St Werburgh. The abbey was closed in 1540 as part of Henry VIII's dissolution frenzy, but was reconsecrated as a cathedral the following year. Although the cathedral itself was given a substantial Victorian face-lift, the 12th-century cloister and its surrounding buildings are essentially unaltered and retain much of the structure from the early monastic years. Take a 1¼-hour **guided tour** (free; 🕑 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) to really get to grips with the building and its history.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To Chester Zoo via A41 (3mi); Ellesmere Port Boat Museum (8mi); Blue Planet (9mi)
To Green Bough (0.3mi)
Hoole Rd
Brook St
Chester Station
City Rd
St Oswald's Way
National Express Coach Station
George St
Lower Northgate St
Milton St
Shropshire Union Canal
Canal St
Watertower St
King St
Hunter St
Abbey St
Frodsham St
Princess St
St Werburgh St
Boughton
Forum Shopping Centre
Bedward Rd
Northgate St
Hamilton Pl
Foregate St
St Werburgh's
Union St
Love St
St Martin's Way
The Cross
Eastgate St
St John St
Convent
Grosvenor Precinct Shopping Centre
Vicar's La
Watergate St
Grosvenor Park
New Crane St
Nicholas St
Weaver St
Commonhall St
Bridge St
Little St John's St
Greyfriars
Whitefriars
Pepper St
Roman Gardens
Nuns Rd
Roman Harbour Wall
Blackfriars
Grosvenor St
Lower Bridge St
Dee
The Groves
Castle St
QUEEN'S PARK
The Roodee
Chester Castle
Castle Dr
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Roodee
Grosvenor Rd
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Chester Royal Infirmary	**2**	A2
Chester Visitors' Centre	**3**	C3
i-station	**4**	B2
Post Office	**5**	C3
Tourist Office	**6**	B2
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Bithell Boats	**8**	B4
Boat Hire	**9**	C3
Bridgegate	**10**	B4
Cathedral	**11**	B2
Dewa Roman Experience	**12**	B3
Eastgate Clock	**13**	B3
Grosvenor Museum	**14**	B4
Roman Amphitheatre	**15**	C3
St John the Baptist Church	**16**	C3
Wishing Steps	**17**	C3
SLEEPING		
Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa	**18**	B3
Chester Townhouse	**19**	A2
Grove Villa	**20**	C3
EATING		
Arkle	(see 18)	
Boulevard de la Bastille	**21**	B3
Living Room	**22**	B2
DRINKING		
Albion	**23**	C3
Alexander's Jazz Theatre	**24**	B2
Falcon	**25**	B3
TRANSPORT		
City-Rail Link Bus Stop	**26**	C2
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The excellent **Grosvenor Museum** (☎ 402008; Grosvenor St; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) is the place to go if you want to study Chester's rich and varied history, beginning with a comprehensive collection of Roman tombstones, the largest display in the country.

At the back of the museum is a preserved Georgian house, complete with kitchen, drawing room, bedroom and bathroom.

The **Dewa Roman Experience** (☎ 343407; www.dewaromanexperience.co.uk; Pierpoint Lane; admission £4.25; 🕒 9am-5pm), just off Bridge St, takes you through a reconstructed Roman street with the aim of showing you what Roman life was like.

The city's most complete set of genuine Roman remains is opposite the Chester Visitors Centre, outside the city walls. Here you'll find what's left of the **Roman amphitheatre** (admission free); once an arena that seated 7000 spectators (making it the country's largest), now little more than steps buried in grass.

Steps at the back of the amphitheatre lead down to the riverside promenade known as the **Groves**. Here you can hire different kinds of **boats** (per hr £6-8; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Sep) with pedals, oars or small engines. This is also the departure point for river cruises (see below).

Tours

The two tourist offices offer a broad range of walking tours departing from both centres. Each tour lasts between 1½ and two hours.

Ghosthunter Trail (adult/child £4.50/3.50; 🕒 7.30pm Thu-Sat Jun-Oct, Sat only Nov-May) The ubiquitous ghost tour, looking for things that go bump in the night.

History Hunter (adult/child £4/3; 🕒 10.15am) Two thousand years of Chester history.

Roman Soldier Patrols (adult/child £4.50/3.50; 🕒 1.45pm Thu-Sat Jun-Aug) This tour of Fortress Deva is led by Caius Julius Quartus; perfect if you've kids in tow.

Secret Chester (adult/child £4.50/3.50; 🕒 2pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun May-Oct) Exactly what it says on the tin.

You can also take a cruise along the Dee; contact **Bithell Boats** (☎ 325394; www.showboatsofchester.co.uk) for details of its 30-minute and hour-long cruises up and down the Dee, including a foray into the gorgeous Eaton Estate, home of the duke and duchess of Westminster. All departures are from the riverside along the Groves and cost from £6 to £13.50.

A BIT OF CHARISMA

Buy the new **Charisma Card** (www.chestercharisma.com; £5.99), available from the tourist offices or online, to get 20% discount at more than 200 restaurants, shops and visitor attractions.

Sleeping

If you're visiting between Easter and September, book early. Except for a handful of options – including the city's best – most of the accommodation is outside the city walls but within easy walking distance of the centre. Hoole Rd, a 10- to 15-minute walk from the centre and leading beyond the railway tracks to the M53/M56, is lined with low- to mid-price B&Bs.

Brook St, near the train station, has a couple of good-value B&Bs from around £22 per person.

Chester YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5762; www.yha.org.uk; 40 Hough Green; dm £17.50) Located in an elegant Victorian home about a mile from the city centre, this hostel has a variety of dorms that sleep from two to 10 people; there's also a cafeteria, a kitchen and a shop on the premises.

Grove Villa (☎ 349713; 18 The Groves; s/d from £30/48) You won't find a more tranquil spot in town than this wonderfully positioned Victorian home overlooking the Dee. The rooms have antique beds and great river views.

Chester Townhouse (☎ 350021; 23 King St; s/d £45/70; P) Five beautifully decorated rooms in a handsome 17th-century house within the city walls make for a terrific option – you're close to the action and you'll sleep in relative luxury.

our pick **Green Bough** (☎ 326241; www.greenbough.co.uk; 60 Hoole Rd; r from £150) This exclusive Victorian town house won England Tourism's 'Best Small Hotel of the Year' award for 2006 – and a worthy winner it was too. The individually styled rooms are dressed in the best Italian fabrics and wall coverings, superb antique furniture and period cast-iron and wooden beds, including a handful of elegant four-posters.

Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa (☎ 324024; www.chestergrosvenor.com; 58 Eastgate St; s/d/ste from £120/190/380; P 💻) The best hotel in town with the best location. The huge, sprawling rooms have exquisite period furnishings and all mod cons; the spa (which is open to non-residents) offers a range of body treatments. There's also a Michelin-starred restaurant downstairs (see opposite).

Eating

There's no shortage of places to eat, but the quality of the fare is often barely above tourist-menu standard. Some pubs do great grub (see opposite).

Boulevard de la Bastille (Bridge St; sandwiches £3, meals £5-7; 🕒 9am-6pm) Our favourite café in town is also one of the most handsome: a very French place on the top tier of the Rows that is perfect for a *café au lait* (white coffee) and *pain au chocolat* (chocolate croissant).

Living Room (☎ 0870 442 2805; 13 St Werburgh St; mains £9-11; 🕒 11am-late) It's a chain all right, but a very pleasing and popular one at that. The Chester version is spread over three floors, which include the Dining Room and the Study private bar. It's behind the cathedral.

Arkle (☎ 895618; www.chestergrosvenor.com; Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa, 58 Eastgate St; 3-course dinners £55; 🕒 dinner Tue-Sat) Named after the famous Irish champion racehorse, Simon Radley's Arkle serves up a sumptuous feast of French-inspired classics such as tranche of monkfish with air-dried ham and braised turbot with baby squid. It's elegant (gentlemen in jackets, please), sophisticated and has a Michelin star to prove it.

Drinking

Falcon (☎ 314555; Lower Bridge St) This is an old-fashioned boozer with a lovely atmosphere; the surprisingly adventurous menu (mains from £4.95) offers up dishes such as Jamaican peppered beef or spicy Italian sausage casserole. Great for both a pint and a bite.

Albion (☎ 340345; 4 Albion St) No children, no music, and no machines or big screens (but plenty of Union Jacks). This 'family hostile' Edwardian classic pub is a throwback to a time when ale-drinking still had its own *rituals* – another word for ingrained prejudices. Still, this is one of the finest pubs in northwest England precisely because it doggedly refuses to modernise. Also serves meals (mains £8 to £10).

Alexander's Jazz Theatre (☎ 340005; Rufus Ct; admission £3-10, free before 10pm) A combination wine bar, coffee bar and tapas bar.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The coach station for **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) is just north of the city inside the ring road. Destinations include Birmingham (£10.20, 2½ hours, four daily), Liverpool (£6.20, one hour, three daily), London (£21, 5½ hours, three daily) and Manchester (£5.70, 1¼ hours, three daily).

For information on local bus services, ring the **Cheshire Bus Line** (☎ 602666). Local buses leave from the Town Hall Bus Exchange. On Sundays and Bank Holidays a Sunday Adventurer ticket (adult/child £3.50/2.50) gives you unlimited travel in Cheshire.

TRAIN

The train station is a 15-minute walk from the city centre via Foregate St and City Rd, or Brook St. City-Rail Link buses are free for people with rail tickets, and run between the station and Bus Stop A on Frodsham St. Trains go to Liverpool (£4, 40 minutes, hourly), London Euston (£56.20, three hours, hourly) and Manchester (£10.30, one hour, hourly).

Getting Around

Much of the city centre is closed to traffic from 10.30am to 4.30pm, so a car is likely to be a hindrance. Anyway, the city is easy to walk around and most places of interest are close to the wall.

City buses depart from the **Town Hall Bus Exchange** (☎ 602666).

Davies Bros Cycles (☎ 371341; 5 Delamere St) has mountain bikes for hire at £13 per day.

AROUND CHESTER

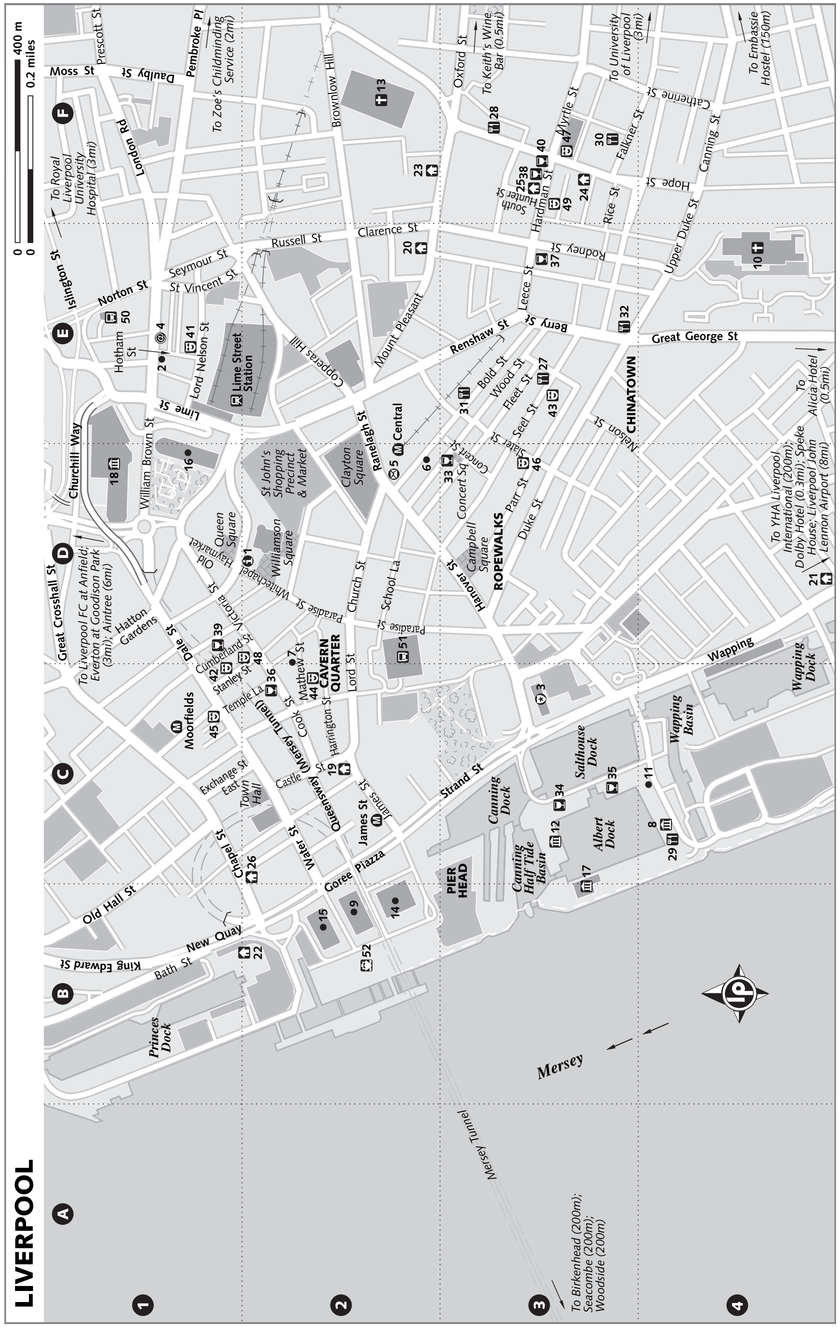
Chester Zoo

The largest of its kind in the country, **Chester Zoo** (☎ 380280; www.chesterzoo.org.uk; adult/child £14.50/10.50; 🕒 10am-dusk, last admission 4pm Mon-Fri, 5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 3pm Mon-Fri, 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is about as pleasant a place as caged animals in artificial renditions of their natural habitats could ever expect to live. It's so big that there's even a **monorail** (adult/child £2/1.50) and a **waterbus** (adult/child £2/1.50) to get around on. The zoo is on the A41, 3 miles north of Chester's city centre. Buses 11C and 12C (£2.50 return, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, half-hourly Sunday) run between the town hall and the zoo.

LIVERPOOL

☎ 0151 / pop 469, 020

Dogged, determined and for many decades down-at-heel, Liverpool just refused to go down. When unfancied Liverpool FC overcame a 3–0 half-time deficit to win the 2005 European Champions' League final, it transcended the much narrower boundaries of football and was quickly adopted by this passionate, football-mad city as the latest – and most poetic – expression of Scouse defiance in the face of all the odds.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London Rd
To Royal Liverpool University Hospital (3mi)
Brownlow Hill
Oxford St
To Keith's Wine Bar (0.5mi)
Myrtle St
To University of Liverpool (3mi)
Catharine St
To Embassie Hostel (150m)
Falkner St
Hope St
Canning St
Hardman St
South Hunter St
Rice St
Upper Duke St
Russell St
Clarence St
Seymour St
St Vincent St
Norton St
Islington St
Rodney St
Leece St
Mount Pleasant
Copperas Hill
Renshaw St
Berry St
Great George St
Hotham St
Lord Nelson St
Lime Street Station
Lime St
Bold St
Wood St
Fleet St
Seel St
Slater St
Concert Sq
Nelson St
CHINATOWN
To Alicia Hotel (0.5mi)
Central
Ranelagh St
Clayton Square
St John's Shopping Precinct & Market
Churchill Way
William Brown St
Queen Square
Williamson Square
Old Haymarket
Whitechapel
Hanover St
Campbell Square
ROPEWALKS
Parr St
Duke St
To YHA Liverpool International (200m); Dolby Hotel (0.3mi); Speke House; Liverpool John Lennon Airport (8mi)
Great Crosshall St
To Liverpool FC at Anfield; Everton at Goodison Park (3mi); Aintree (6mi)
Hatton Gardens
Dale St
Victoria St
Cumberland St
Stanley St
Temple La
Mathew St
CAVERN QUARTER
Church St
School La
Paradise St
Lord St
Moorfields
(Mersey Tunnel)
Cook St
Harrington St
Exchange St East
Town Hall
Castle St
Queensway
James St
Water St
Chapel St
Strand St
Wapping
Wapping Dock
Wapping Basin
Salthouse Dock
Canning Dock
Albert Dock
Canning Half Tide Basin
PIER HEAD
Goree Piazza
Old Hall St
New Quay
King Edward St
Bath St
Princes Dock
Mersey
Mersey Tunnel
To Birkenhead (200m); Seacombe (200m); Woodside (200m)

INFORMATION		
08 Place Tourist Office	1	D2
Albert Dock Tourist Office	(see 12)	
CaféLatte.net	(see 25)	
Mars Pharmacy	2	E1
Merseyside Police Headquarters	3	C3
Planet Electra	4	E1
Post Office	5	D2
Waterstone's	6	D2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Beatles Shop	7	D2
Beatles Story	8	C4
Cunard Building	9	B2
Liverpool Cathedral	10	E4
Magical Mystery Tour Bus Stop	11	C4
Merseyside Maritime Museum	12	C3
Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King	13	F2
Port of Liverpool Building	14	B2
Royal Liver Building	15	B2
St George's Hall	16	D1
Tate Liverpool	17	B3
Walker Art Gallery	(see 18)	
World Museum Liverpool	18	D1
Yellow Duckmarine Tour Bus Stop	(see 11)	
SLEEPING		
62 Castle St	19	C2
Aachen Hotel	20	E2
Campanile Hotel	21	D4
Crowne Plaza Liverpool	22	B2
Feathers Hotel	23	F2
Hope Street Hotel	24	F3
International Inn	25	F3
Liverpool Racquet Club	26	C2
EATING		
Alma de Cuba	27	E3
Everyman Bistro	28	F3
London Carriage Works	(see 24)	
Pan-American Club	29	C4
Quarter	30	F3
Quynny's Quisine	31	E3
Yuet Ben	32	E3
DRINKING		
Baa Bar	33	D3
Baby Cream	34	C3
Blue Bar	35	C3
Curzon	36	C2
Hannah's	37	E3
Magnet	38	F3
Masquerade Bar	39	D1
Philharmonic	40	F3
ENTERTAINMENT		
Academy	41	E1
Babystorm	42	C1
Barfly	43	E3
Cavern Club	44	C2
Everyman Theatre	(see 28)	
G-Bar	45	C1
Garlands	(see 45)	
Nation	46	D3
Philharmonic Hall	47	F3
Superstar Boudoir	48	D2
Unity Theatre	49	F3
TRANSPORT		
National Express Coach Station	50	E1
Paradise Street Bus Station & Parking	51	D2
Pier Head Ferry Terminal	52	B2

Liverpool will be European Capital of Culture in 2008, and the city has spent the last few years getting ready for the ball. Handsome old buildings have had facials and brand-new ones shine spotlessly on the skyline. The once boarded-up warehouses of the city centre have been transformed into new shops, cafés and fancy apartments.

Impressive stuff, no doubt, but it's the culture on offer that really has us buzzing. The city's superb museums and top-class art galleries – all free – have put paid to the scurrilous rumour that Liverpool peaked with the Beatles: in 2004 the whole of the waterfront and docks was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site because there are more listed buildings here than in any other city in England except London. And then, of course, the nightlife: as rich and varied as you'd expect from a good northern city.

HISTORY

Liverpool grew wealthy on the back of the triangular trading of slaves, raw materials and finished goods. From 1700 ships carried cotton goods and hardware from Liverpool to West Africa, where they were exchanged for slaves, who in turn were carried to the West Indies and Virginia, where they were exchanged for sugar, rum, tobacco and raw cotton.

As a great port, the city drew thousands of Irish and Scottish immigrants, and its Celtic influences are still apparent. However, between 1830 and 1930 nine million emigrants – mainly English, Scots and Irish, but also Swedes, Norwegians and Russian Jews – sailed from here for the New World.

The start of WWII led to a resurgence of Liverpool's importance. More than one million American GIs disembarked here before D-Day and the port was, once again, hugely important as the western gateway for transatlantic supplies. The GIs brought with them the latest American records, and Liverpool was thus the first European port of call for the new rhythm and blues that would eventually become rock and roll. Within 20 years, the Mersey Beat was *the* sound of British pop and four mop-topped Scousers had formed a skiffle band…

ORIENTATION

Liverpool is a cinch to get around. The main attractions are Albert Dock, west of the city centre, and the trendy Ropewalks area, south of Hanover St and west of the two cathedrals. Lime St station, the bus station, the tourist office and the Cavern Quarter – a mecca for Beatles fans – lie just to the north.

The tourist office and many of the city's hotels have an excellent map with all of the city's attractions clearly outlined.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Waterstone's (☎ 708 6861; 14-16 Bold St)

Emergencies

Merseyside police headquarters (☎ 709 6010; Canning Pl) Opposite Albert Dock.

Internet Access

CaféLatte.net (☎ 709 9683; 4 S Hunter St; per 30min £1; 🕒 9am-6pm)

Planet Electra (☎ 708 0303; 36 London Rd; per 30min £1; 🕒 9am-5pm)

Internet Resources

08 Place (www.liverpool08.com) Info on the capital of culture.

Clubs in Liverpool (www.clubsinliverpool.co.uk) Everything you need to know about what goes on when the sun goes down.

Mersey Guide (www.merseyguide.co.uk) Guide to the Greater Mersey area.

Merseyside Today (www.merseysidetoday.co.uk) Guide to the city and surrounding area.

Tourist office (www.visitliverpool.com)

Medical Services

Mars Pharmacy (☎ 709 5271; 68 London Rd) Open until 10pm every night.

Royal Liverpool University Hospital (☎ 706 2000; Prescot St)

Post

Post office (Ranelagh St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

The tourist office has three branches in the city. It also has an **accommodation hotline** (☎ 0845 601 1125).

08 Place tourist office (☎ 233 2008; Whitechapel; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) The main branch of the tourist office.

Albert Dock tourist office (☎ 478 4599; Merseyside Maritime Museum; 🕒 10am-6pm)

SIGHTS

The wonderful Albert Dock is the city's biggest tourist draw and the key to understanding the city's history, but the city centre is where you'll find most of Liverpool's real day-to-day life.

City Centre

ST GEORGE'S HALL

Arguably Liverpool's most impressive building, **St George's Hall** (☎ 707 2391; www.stgeorgeshall.com) was built in 1854 and is the first European offering of neoclassical architecture. Curiously, it was built as law courts *and* a concert hall – presumably a judge could pass sentence and then relax to a string quartet. **Tours** (£4.50) of the newly renovated hall are run in conjunction with the tourist office; check for times.

WALKER ART GALLERY

The 'National Gallery of the North', the city's foremost **gallery** (☎ 478 4199; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker; William Brown St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is Liverpool's answer to critics who question the city's cultural credentials in the lead-up to 2008. The history of art from the 14th to the 20th centuries is covered in exquisite detail; strong suits are Pre-Raphaelite art, modern British art, and sculpture.

WORLD MUSEUM LIVERPOOL

Natural history, science and technology are the themes of this sprawling **museum** (☎ 478 4399; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml; William Brown St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), whose exhibits range from birds of prey to space exploration. It also includes the country's only free planetarium. This vastly entertaining and educational museum is divided into four major sections: the Human World, one of the top anthropological collections in the country; the Natural World, which includes a new aquarium as well as live insect colonies; Earth, a geological treasure trove; and Space & Time, which includes the planetarium. Highly recommended.

CATHEDRALS

The city's two cathedrals are separated by the length of Hope St. At the northern end, the Roman Catholic **Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King** (☎ 709 9222; off Mt Pleasant; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun Oct-Mar) was completed in 1967 according to the design of Sir Frederick Gibberd and after the original plans by Sir Edwin Lutyens, whose crypt is inside. It's a mightily impressive modern building that looks like a soaring concrete tepee, hence its nickname, Paddy's Wigwam.

At Hope St's southern end stands the neo-Gothic **Liverpool Cathedral** (☎ 709 6271; www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk; Hope St; voluntary donation £3; 🕒 8am-6pm), the life work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), whose other contributions to the world were the red telephone box, and the power station in London that is now home to the Tate Modern. Size is a big deal here: this is the largest church in Britain and the largest Anglican cathedral in the world. The central bell is the world's third-largest (with the world's highest and heaviest peal), while the organ, with its 9765 pipes, is probably the world's largest operational model. Construction on a new visitor centre was underway throughout 2006, but should be open in early 2007.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Let's get a little greedy and do a two-for-one weekend: separated by the spine of the Pennines and historic rivalries of nearly epic proportions, Liverpool and Manchester are only 37 miles apart. Spend the first night in Liverpool – check in to the **Hope Street Hotel** (p577) to really do it in style. It's Friday night, so dinner at **Alma de Cuba** (p579) should be followed by a pint in the **Philharmonic** (p579) or a spot of dancing at one of the many clubs in and around Ropewalks. Saturday is all about the museums of the city centre and Albert Dock, which should leave you plenty of time to make your train to Manchester.

Claim your room at Manchester's **Great John Street Hotel** (p563) – yup, we're still stylin', but if you're looking for something a little more demure, the **Ox** (p562) offers affordable cool – then do a little window shopping before grabbing a bite. Pick a bar, any bar, and keep going: there's an unhealthy choice of clubs if you're not that keen on a Sunday-morning start.

You have your choice of things to visit, but we recommend **Urbis** (p560) and the **Imperial War Museum North** (p560) for a mere taste of the city's cool culture.

But, if dreams could come true, this would be our ideal way to spend the weekend: we'd have tickets to see Liverpool play (and beat) Chelsea on Saturday afternoon at **Anfield** (p581), while Sunday afternoon would see us make the trek to **Old Trafford** (p561) to see United struggle to get a draw against Manchester City in the derby. Ah, to sleep, perchance to dream...

There are terrific views of Liverpool from the top of the 101m **tower** (admission £4.25; 🕒 11am-3pm Mon-Sat).

Albert Dock

Liverpool's biggest tourist attraction is **Albert Dock** (☎ 708 8854; www.albertdock.com; admission free), 2.75 hectares of water ringed by a colonnade of enormous cast-iron columns and impressive five-storey warehouses that make up the country's largest collection of protected buildings, now a World Heritage Site. A fabulous development programme has really brought the dock to life; here you'll find several outstanding museums and an extension of London's Tate Gallery, as well as a couple of top-class restaurants and bars.

MERSEYSIDE MARITIME MUSEUM

The story of one of the world's great ports is the theme of this excellent **museum** (☎ 478 4499; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime; Albert Dock; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), and believe us, it's a graphic and compelling page-turner. One of the many great exhibits is Emigration to a New World, which tells the story of nine million emigrants and their efforts to get to North America and Australia; the walk-through model of a typical ship shows just how tough conditions on board really were. But the real highlight is the Transatlantic Slavery exhibit, which pulls no punches in its portrayal of the shameful trade that made Liverpool rich and left us with the scourge of modern racism. This is heady stuff, and should on no account be missed.

TATE LIVERPOOL

Touted as the home of modern art in the north, this **gallery** (☎ 702 7400; www.tate.org.uk/liverpool; Albert Dock; admission free, special exhibitions adult/child £4/3; 🕒 10am-5.50pm Jun-Aug, Tue-Sun only Sep-May) features a substantial check-list of 20th-century artists across its four floors as well as touring exhibitions from the Mother Ship on London's Bankside. But it's all a little sparse, with none of the energy we'd expect from the world-famous Tate.

BEATLES STORY

Liverpool's most popular **museum** (☎ 709 1963; www.beatlesstory.com; Albert Dock; adult/child £8.99/5.99; 🕒 10am-6pm) won't illuminate any dark, juicy corners in the turbulent history of the world's most famous foursome – there's ne'er a mention of internal discord, drugs, Yoko Ono or the Frog Song – but there's plenty of genuine memorabilia to keep a Beatles fan happy. Particularly impressive is the full-size replica Cavern Club (which was actually tiny) and the Abbey Road studio where the lads recorded their first singles, while George Harrison's crappy first guitar (now worth half a million quid) should inspire budding, penniless musicians to keep the faith. The museum is also the departure point for the Magical Mystery and Yellow Duckmarine tours (see p577).

North of Albert Dock

The area to the north of Albert Dock is known as **Pier Head**, after a stone pier built in the 1760s. This is still the departure point for ferries across the River Mersey (see p582), and was, for millions of migrants, their final contact with European soil.

Today this area is dominated by a trio of Edwardian buildings known as the 'Three Graces', dating from the days when Liverpool's star was still ascending. The southernmost, with the dome mimicking St Paul's Cathedral, is the **Port of Liverpool Building**, completed in 1907. Next to it is the **Cunard Building**, in the style of an Italian palazzo, once HQ to the Cunard Steamship Line. Finally, the **Royal Liver Building** (pronounced lie-ver) was opened in 1911 as the head office of the Royal Liver Friendly Society. It's crowned by Liverpool's symbol, the famous 5.5m copper Liver Bird.

LIVERPOOL FOR CHILDREN

The complex of museums on Albert Dock is extremely popular with kids, especially the Merseyside Maritime Museum (p575) – which has a couple of boats for kids to mess about on – and the Beatles Story (p575). The Yellow Duckmarine Tour (opposite) is a sure-fire winner. Slightly older (and very old) kids – especially those into football – will enjoy the tour of Liverpool FC's Anfield stadium (p581) as you can get your feet on the sacred turf.

Need a break from the tots? Drop them off at **Zoe's Childminding Service** (☎ 228 2685; 15 Woodbourne Rd), about 2 miles east of the city centre.

QUIRKY LIVERPOOL

When a working public toilet is a tourist attraction, you know you have something special, and the men's loo at the Philharmonic (p579) is just that. The Yellow Duckmarine Tour (opposite), an amphibious exploration of Albert Dock, is a bit silly but the guides are hilarious, and taking the ferry across the River Mersey (opposite) is always something special – the tired commuters will give you more than a stare if you sing the song too loudly. The Grand National Experience (p581) at Aintree is proof that the English really do love their horses, and the concerts at the Philharmonic Hall (p581) often throw up something completely different and avant-garde instead of the Beethoven concerto you might expect.

TOURS

Liverpool Beatles Tour (☎ 281 7738; www.beatlestours.co.uk; from adult £18; 🕒 2hr-1 day) Your own personalised tour of every bit of minutiae associated with the Beatles, from cradle to grave. Tour lengths range from the two-hour Helter Skelter excursion to A Day in the Life, by the end of which you'll presumably be convinced you were actually in the band. Pick-ups are arranged upon booking.

Magical Mystery Tour (☎ 709 3285; www.cavern-liverpool.co.uk; £12.95; 🕒 2.30pm year-round, plus noon Sat Jul & Aug) This two-hour tour takes in all Beatles-related landmarks – their birthplaces, childhood homes, schools and places such as Penny Lane and Strawberry Field – before finishing up in the Cavern Club (which isn't the original). Departs from outside the Beatles Story on Albert Dock.

LIVERPOOL IN…

Two Days

Head to the waterfront and explore the Albert Dock museums – the **Tate** (p575) and **Merseyside Maritime Museum** (p575) – before paying tribute to the Fab Four at the **Beatles Story** (p575). Keep to the Beatles theme and head north towards the Cavern Quarter around Mathew St. Round off your evening with dinner at **London Carriage Works** (p579), a pint at the marvellous **Philharmonic** (p579) and wrap yourself in the crisp linen sheets of the **Hope Street Hotel** (opposite). Night hawks can tear it up in the bars and clubs of the hip **Ropewalks area** (p580). The next day, explore the city's two **cathedrals** (p574) and check out the twin delights of the **World Museum Liverpool** (p574) and the **Walker Art Gallery** (p574).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary but add in a **Yellow Duckmarine tour** (opposite) to experience the docks from the water. Make a couple of pilgrimages to suit your interests: visit **Mendips** (p578) and **20 Forthlin Rd** (p578), the childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, respectively; or walk on holy ground at **Anfield** (p581), home of Liverpool Football Club.

River Explorer Cruise (☎ 639 0609; www.merseyferries.co.uk; adult/child return £4.95/2.75; 🕒 hourly 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) Do as Gerry & the Pacemakers wanted and take a ferry 'cross the Mersey, exploring the bay and all its attractions as you go. Departs from Pier Head.

Yellow Duckmarine Tour (☎ 708 7799; www.theyellowduckmarine.co.uk; adult/child/family £11.95/9.95/34; 🕒 from 11am) Take to the dock waters in a WWII amphibious vehicle after a quickie tour of the city centre's main points of interest. It's not especially educational, but it is a bit of fun. Departs from Albert Dock, near the Beatles Story.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Aintree Festival (☎ 522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) A three-day race meet culminating in the world-famous Grand National on the first Saturday in April.

Merseyside International Street Festival (www.brouhaha.uk.com) A three-week extravaganza of world culture beginning in mid-July and featuring indoor and outdoor performances by artists and musicians from pretty much everywhere.

Creamfields (☎ 0208-969 4477; www.cream.co.uk) Alfresco dance-fest that brings some of the world's best DJs and dance acts together during the last weekend in August. It takes place at the Daresbury Estate near Halton, Cheshire.

Mathew Street Festival (☎ 239 9091; www.mathewstreetfestival.com) The world's biggest tribute to the Beatles features six days of music, a convention and a memorabilia auction during the last week of August.

SLEEPING

As Liverpool's cultural scene heats up, so do its hotels. Stylish new arrivals and business chains have muscled in on the traditional stalwarts and forced them to buck up or close down, with the result that while the choice has improved dramatically, you'll end up paying for the privilege. Beds are tough to find when Liverpool FC are playing at home (it's less of a problem with Everton) and during the Beatles convention in the last week of August.

City Centre

BUDGET

Embassie Hostel (☎ 707 1089; www.embassie.com; 1 Falkner Sq; dm £14.50) Until 1986 this lovely Georgian house was the Venezuelan consulate; it has since been converted into a decent hostel that serves free tea, coffee and toast at all times. There's also a TV lounge, a games room and a self-catering kitchen.

International Inn (☎ 709 8135; www.internationalinn.co.uk; 4 S Hunter St; dm/d £18/40) A superb converted warehouse in the middle of uni-land: en suite, heated rooms with tidy wooden beds and bunks accommodate from two to 10 people. Facilities include a lounge, baggage storage, laundry and 24-hour front desk. The staff are terrific and the CafféLatte.net internet café is next door.

MIDRANGE

Aachen Hotel (☎ 709 3477; www.aachenhotel.co.uk; 89-91 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £32/50) A perennial favourite is this funky listed house with a mix of rooms both shared or with en suite. The décor is strictly late '70s to early '80s – lots of flower patterns and crazy colour schemes – but it's all part of the welcoming, offbeat atmosphere.

Feathers Hotel (☎ 709 9655; www.feathers.uk.com; 119-125 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £52.50/75) A better choice than most of the similar-priced chain hotels, this rambling place spreads itself across a terrace of Georgian houses close to the Metropolitan Cathedral. The rooms are all comfortable (except for the wardrobe-size singles at the top of the building) and all feature nice touches such as full-package satellite TV. The all-you-can-eat buffet breakfast is a welcome morning treat.

Alicia Hotel (☎ 727 4411; www.feathers.uk.com; 3 Aigburth Dr, Sefton Park; r £55) Once a wealthy cotton merchant's home, Alicia is a sister hotel to the more central Feathers, but it's a far more handsome place. Most of the rooms have extra luxuries, such as CD players and PlayStations. There's also a nice park on the grounds.

TOP END

Liverpool Racquet Club (☎ 236 6676; www.racquetclub.org.uk; Hargreaves Bldg, 5 Chapel St; r £110) Eight individually styled rooms with influences that range from French country house to Japanese minimalist chic (often in the same room). This boutique hotel is one of the most elegant choices in town. Antique beds, sumptuous Frette linen, free-standing baths and exclusive toiletries are all teasers to a pretty classy stay.

62 Castle St (☎ 702 7898; www.62castlest.com; 62 Castle St; s/d £145/175; P 💻) As exclusive a boutique hotel as you'll find anywhere, this wonderful new property successfully blends the traditional Victorian features of the building with a sexy, contemporary style. The 20 fabulously different suites come with plasma-screen TVs, drench showers and Elemis toiletries as standard.

our pick **Hope Street Hotel** (☎ 709 3000; www.hopestreethotel.co.uk; 40 Hope St; r/ste from £140/205)

Luxurious Liverpool's pre-eminent flag-waver is this stunning boutique hotel on the city's most elegant street. The building's original features – heavy wooden beams, cast-iron columns and plenty of exposed brickwork – have been incorporated into a contemporary design inspired by the style of a 16th-century Venetian palazzo. King-size beds draped in Egyptian cotton, oak floors with underfloor heating, LCD wide-screen TVs (with DVD players) and sleek modern bathrooms replete with a range of REN bath and beauty products are but the most obvious touches of class at this supremely cool address. Breakfast, taken in the marvellous London Carriage Works (opposite), is not included.

Around Albert Dock

YHA Liverpool International (☎ 0870 770 5924; www.yha.org.uk; 25 Tabley St; dm £20.95) It may look like an Eastern European apartment complex, but this award-winning hostel, adorned with Beatles memorabilia, is one of the most comfortable you'll find anywhere in the country. The en-suite dorms even have heated towel rails, and rates include breakfast.

Campanile Hotel (☎ 709 8104; fax 709 8725; cnr Wapping & Chaloner Sts; r £46.50; 🅿) Functional, motel-style rooms in a purpose-built hotel next to Albert Dock. Great location and perfect for families – children under 12 stay for free.

Dolby Hotel (☎ 708 7272; www.dolbyhotels.co.uk; 36-42 Chaloner St; r from £45) Well-run hotel with good-sized, well-equipped rooms aimed to rival some of the more renowned budget chains. The Dolby does a great job and we applaud it for it.

Crowne Plaza Liverpool (☎ 243 8000; www.cpliverpool.com; St Nicholas Pl, Princes Dock, Pier Head; r from £90; 🅿 🏊) The paragon of the modern and luxurious business hotel, the Crowne Plaza has a marvellous waterfront location and plenty of facilities including a health club and swimming pool.

EATING

Liverpool's dining scene is getting better all the time. There are plenty of choices in Ropewalks; along Hardman St and Hope St; along Nelson St in the heart of Chinatown; or slightly further afield in Lark Lane, near to Sefton Park, which is packed with restaurants.

City Centre

BUDGET

Everyman Bistro (☎ 708 9545; 13 Hope St; mains £4-7; 🕑 noon-2am Mon-Fri, 11am-2am Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Out-of-work actors and other creative types on a budget make this great café-restaurant beneath the Everyman Theatre their second home – with good reason. Great tucker and a terrific atmosphere.

Keith's Wine Bar (☎ 728 7688; 107 Lark Lane; mains around £5; 🕑 11am-11pm) Friendly, bohemian and mostly vegetarian hang-out with a sensational wine cellar that is the favourite resting place of the city's alternative-lifestyle crowd.

DOING THE BEATLES TO DEATH

Between March 1961 and August 1963, the Beatles played a staggering 275 gigs in a club on Mathew St called the Cavern, which was essentially a basement with a stage and a sound system. They shared the stage with other local bands who helped define the Mersey Beat, but it was John, Paul, George and Ringo who emerged into the sunlight of superstardom, unparalleled success and crass marketing.

Forty years later, the club is gone, the band has long broken up and two of its members are dead, but the phenomenon lives on and is still the biggest tourist magnet in town. The Cavern Quarter – basically a small warren of streets around Mathew St – has been transformed to cash in on the band's seemingly unending earning power: the Rubber Soul Oyster Bar, the From Me to You shop and the Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds café should give you an idea of what to expect. For decent memorabilia, check out the **Beatles Shop** (www.thebeatleshop.co.uk; 31 Mathew St).

True fans will undoubtedly want to visit the National Trust–owned **Mendips**, the home where John lived with his Aunt Mimi from 1945 to 1963, and **20 Forthlin Rd**, the rather plain terraced home where Paul grew up; you can only do so by prebooked **tour** (☎ 427 7231; £12; 🕑 10.30am & 11.20am Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) from outside the National Conservation Centre. Visitors to Speke Hall (see p582) can also visit both from there.

If you'd rather do it yourself, the tourist offices also stock the *Discover Lennon's Liverpool* guide and map, and *Robin Jones' Beatles Liverpool*.

Quynny's Quisine (☎ 708 7757; 45a Bold St; mains £5-7; 🕑 9.30am-9pm) Refried beans, plantains, salads and other Caribbean goodies are hearty and genuine at this basement restaurant. Going underground isn't normally ideal for dining, but in this case it just ensures that fewer people crowd in and there's more room for you.

MIDRANGE

Quarter (☎ 707 1965; 7 Falkner St; mains £8-13; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A gorgeous little wine bar and bistro with outdoor seating for that elusive summer's day. It's perfect for a lunchtime plate of pasta or just a coffee and a slice of mouth-watering cake.

Yuet Ben (☎ 709 5772; 1 Upper Duke St; mains £9-13; 🕑 5-11pm Tue-Sun) When it comes to the best Chinese food in town, you won't hear too many dissenting voices: Yuet Ben's Beijing cuisine usually comes out tops. The veggie banquet could bring round even the most avid carnivore. Get a seat by the window to eat in the shadow of Europe's largest Chinese gate.

TOP END

Alma de Cuba (☎ 709 7097; www.alma-de-cuba.com; St Peter's Church, Seel St; mains £15-24; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This extraordinary new venture has seen the transformation of a Polish church into a Miami-style Cuban extravaganza, a bar and restaurant where you can feast on a suckling pig (the menu heavily favours meat) or clink a perfectly made *mojito* (rum-based cocktail) at the long bar. *¡Salud!*

London Carriage Works (☎ 705 2222; www.tlcw.co.uk; 40 Hope St; 2-/3-course meals £35/45; 🕑 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) Liverpool's dining revolution is being led by Paul Askew's award-winning restaurant. Its foot soldiers are the fashionistas, socceristas and other members of the style brigade who share the large, open space that is the dining room – actually more of a bright glass box divided only by a series of sculpted glass shards – and indulge themselves in the marvellous, eclectic ethnic menu, which reveals influences from every corner of the world.

Around Albert Dock

Pan-American Club (☎ 709 7097; Britannia Pavilion, Albert Dock; mains £12-22) A truly beautiful warehouse conversion has created this top-class restaurant and bar, easily one of the best dining addresses in town. Fancy steak dinners and other American classics can be washed down with drinks from the Champagne Lounge.

DRINKING

A recent survey has put Merseyside at the top of the All-England drinking league. It's official: Scousers love boozing. Health officials may be in despair, but Liverpool has pubs and bars to suit every taste imaginable. Most of the party action takes place in and around Ropewalks, the heart of which is Concert Sq. Unless specified, all the bars included here open until 2am Monday to Saturday, although most have a nominal entry charge after 11pm.

City Centre

Baa Bar (☎ 707 0610; 43-45 Fleet St) One of the first and still the best of Liverpool's style bars, Baa is packed most nights and remains a favourite watering hole with anyone looking for a good night out; the patio is perfect during the longer summer evenings.

Hannah's (☎ 708 5959; 2 Leece St) One of the top student bars in town. Try to land yourself a table on the outdoor patio, which is covered in the event of rain. Staying open late, a friendly, easy-going crowd and some pretty decent music make this one of the better places to get drunk in.

Magnet (☎ 709 6969; 39 Hardman St) Red leather booths, plenty of velvet and a suitably seedy New York–dive atmosphere where Iggy Pop or Tom Waits would feel right at home. The upstairs bar is very cool but totally chilled out, while downstairs the dance floor shakes to the best music in town, spun by up-and-comers and supported with guest slots by some of Britain's most established DJ names.

Philharmonic (☎ 707 2837; 36 Hope St; 🕑 closes 11.30pm) This extraordinary bar, designed by the shipwrights who built the *Lusitania*, is one of the most beautiful bars in all of England. The interior is resplendent with etched and stained glass, wrought iron, mosaics and ceramic tiling – and if you think that's good, just wait until you see inside the marble men's toilets, the only heritage-listed lav in the country.

Albert Dock

Blue Bar (☎ 709 7097; Edward Pavilion) You don't need a premiership contract to guarantee entry anymore, which means that mere mortals can finally enjoy the relaxed ambience of this elegant waterside lounge. So where have all the footballers gone? Downstairs, to the far more glam Baby Blue, a private members' bar.

Baby Cream (☎ 702 5823; www.babycream.co.uk; Atlantic Pavilion) This supertrendy bar, run by the same crowd that created Liverpool's now-defunct-but-still-legendary Cream nightclub, is gorgeous and pretentious in almost equal measure. One pretty cool feature, though, is Creamselector – a set of touch screens where you can make your own compilation CD from a databank of more than 4000 tracks (for a price) – it's like taking a piece of the famous nightclub home with you.

ENTERTAINMENT

The schedule is pretty full these days, whether it's excellent fringe theatre, a performance by the superb Philharmonic or an all-day rock concert. And then there's the constant backbeat provided by the city's club scene, which pulses and throbs to the wee hours, six nights out of seven. For all information, consult the *Liverpool Echo*.

Nightclubs

Most of the city's clubs are concentrated in Ropewalks, where they compete for customers with a ton of late-night bars; considering the number of punters in the area on a Friday or Saturday night, we're guessing there's plenty of business for everyone. Most clubs open at 11pm and turf everyone out by 3am.

Barfly (☎ 0870 907 0999; 90 Seel St; admission £3-11; ⌚ Mon-Sat) This converted theatre is home to our favourite club in town. The fortnightly Saturday Chibuku Shake Shake (www.chibuku.com) is one of the best club nights in all of England, led by a mix of superb DJs including Yousef (formerly of Cream) and superstars such as Dmitri from Paris and Gilles Peterson. The music ranges from hip-hop to deep house – if you're in town, get in line. Other nights feature a superb mixed bag of music, from trash to techno.

Garlands (☎ 236 2307; www.garlandsonline.co.uk; 8-10 Eberle St; admission £6-10; ⌚ Fri-Sun) House in all sounds and guises rules the roost at this banging club, whose punters were extolled by *Mixmag* magazine as one of the best crowds in England.

Nation (☎ 709 1693; 40 Slater St/Wolstenholme Sq; admission £4-13) It looks like an air-raid shelter, but it's the big-name DJs dropping the bombs at the city's premier dance club, formerly the home of Cream. These days, it also hosts live bands as well as pumping techno nights.

Theatre

Most of Liverpool's theatres feature a mixed bag of revues, musicals and stage successes that are as easy on the eye as they are on the mind, but there is also more interesting work on offer.

Everyman Theatre (☎ 709 4776; 13 Hope St) This is one of England's most famous repertory theatres and an avid supporter of local talent, which has included the likes of Alan Bleasdale.

Unity Theatre (☎ 709 4988; Hope Pl) Fringe theatre for those keen on the unusual and challenging. There's also a great bar on the premises.

Live Music

ROCK MUSIC

Academy (☎ 794 6868; Liverpool University, 11-13 Hotham St) This is the best venue to see touring major bands.

Cavern Club (☎ 236 1965; 8-10 Mathew St) 'The world's most famous club' is not the original basement venue where the Fab Four began their careers, but it's a fairly faithful reconstruction. There's usually a good selection of local bands, and look out for all-day gigs.

GAY & LESBIAN LIVERPOOL

There's no discernible gay quarter in Liverpool, with most of the gay-friendly clubs and bars spread about Dale St and Victoria St in Ropewalks. **G-Bar** (☎ 255 1148; 1-7 Eberle St), in a small lane off Dale St behind Metrolink, is the city's premier gay bar, even though it attracts a mixed crowd. The **Curzon** (☎ 236 5160; 8 Temple Lane) is what one might euphemistically term a man's bar, with lots of hairy, tough-looking guys getting to know each other. For something a little less provocative, the **Masquerade Bar** (☎ 236 7786; 10 Cumberland St) attracts a real mix of gays, lesbians and bis looking for a few laughs and a sing-song.

Many clubs host gay nights, but **Babystorm** (☎ 07845 298863; 12 Stanley St), a relatively new club and bar aimed primarily at the lesbian and bi community, has really taken off; it is a good rival to **Superstar Boudoir** (22-24 Stanley St) as the best gay club in town. Also worth checking out are the gay nights at Garlands (see above). For online listings, check out www.realliverpool.com.

THE GRAND NATIONAL

England loves the gee-gees, but never more so than on the first Saturday in April, when 40-odd veteran stalwarts of the jumps line up at Aintree to race across 4.5 miles and over the most difficult fences in world racing. Since the first running of the Grand National in 1839 – won by the appositely named Lottery – Britain has taken the race to heart and there's hardly a household that doesn't tune in, betting slips nervously in hand.

You can book **tickets** (☎ 522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) for the Grand National, or visit the **Grand National Experience** (☎ 523 2600; adult/child with tour £7/4, without tour £3/2), a visitor centre that includes a race simulator – those jumps are very steep indeed. We recommend the racecourse tour, which takes in the stableyard and the grave of three-time winner Red Rum, the most loved of all Grand National winners.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Philharmonic Hall (☎ 709 3789; Hope St) One of Liverpool's most beautiful buildings, the Art Deco Phil is home to the city's main classical orchestra, but it also stages the work of avant-garde musicians such as John Cage and Nick Cave.

Sport

Liverpool's two football teams – the reds of Liverpool FC and the blues of Everton – are pretty much the alpha and omega of sporting interest in the city. There is no other city in England where the fortunes of its football clubs are so inextricably linked with those of its inhabitants. Yet Liverpool is also home to the Grand National – the world's most famous steeplechase event – that is run in the first weekend in April at Aintree, north of the city (see the boxed text, above).

LIVERPOOL FC

Doff o' the cap to Evertonians and Beatlemaniacs, but no single institution represents the Mersey spirit and strong sense of identity more powerfully than **Liverpool FC** (☎ 263 9199, ticket office 220 2345; www.liverpoolfc.tv; Anfield Rd), England's most successful football club. Virtually unbeatable for much of the 1970s and '80s, they haven't won the league championship since 1990, but in 2005 they became European champions for the fifth time and followed it with an FA Cup in 2006. Led by Spanish manager Rafa Benitez and captained by local boy and legend Steven Gerrard, things are looking seriously good once more for the Reds.

The club's home is the marvellous Anfield, but plans are afoot to relocate to a new 60,000-capacity stadium a stone's throw away in Stanley Park before 2010. The experience of a live match is a memorable one, especially the sound of 40,000 fans singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone', but tickets are pretty tricky to come by. You may have to settle for a **tour** (☎ 260 6677; with museum adult/child £9/5.50; ⌚ every couple of hours except match days) that includes the home dressing room, a walk down the famous tunnel and a seat in the dugout, or simply a visit to the **museum** (admission £5), which features plenty of memorabilia – as well as those five European Cups.

EVERTON FC

Liverpool's 'other' team are the blues of **Everton FC** (☎ 330 2400, ticket office 330 2300; www.evertonfc.com; Goodison Park), who may not have their rivals' winning pedigree but they're just as popular locally.

Tours (☎ 330 2277; adult/child £8.50/5; ⌚ 11am & 2pm Sun-Wed & Fri) of Goodison Park run throughout the year except on the Friday before home matches.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Liverpool John Lennon Airport (☎ 0870 750 8484; www.liverpooljohnlennonairport.co.uk) serves a variety of international destinations including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dublin and Paris, as well as destinations in the UK (Belfast, London and the Isle of Man).

Bus

The **National Express Coach Station** (☎ 08705 808080; Norton St) is 300m north of Lime St station. There are services to/from most major towns, including Manchester (£5.80, 1¼ hours, hourly), Birmingham (£10.20, 2¾ hours, five daily), Newcastle (£18.40, 6½ hours, three daily) and London (£22, five to six hours, seven daily),

Train

Liverpool's main station is Lime St. It has hourly services to almost everywhere, including Chester (£4, 40 minutes), London (£56.50, three hours), Manchester (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Wigan (£4.15, 50 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

The airport is 8 miles south of the centre. **Arriva Airlink** (£1.50; 🕒 6am-11pm) buses 80A and 180 depart from Paradise St station and **Airportxpress 500** (£2; 🕒 5.15am-12.15am) buses from outside Lime St station. Buses from both stations take half an hour and run every 20 minutes. A taxi to the centre should cost no more than £14.

Boat

The famous cross-Mersey **ferry** (adult/child £1.35/1.05) for Woodside and Seacombe departs from Pier Head Ferry Terminal, next to the Liver Building to the north of Albert Dock.

Car

You won't have much use for a car in Liverpool, and it'll end up costing you plenty in car-park fees. If you must drive, there are parking meters around the city and a number of open and sheltered car parks. Car break-ins are a major problem, so leave absolutely nothing of value in the car.

Public Transport

Local public transport is coordinated by **Merseytravel** (☎ 236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk). Highly recommended is the Saveaway ticket (adult/child £3.70/1.90), which allows one day's off-peak travel on all bus, train and ferry services throughout Merseyside. Tickets are available at shops and post offices throughout the city. Paradise St bus station is in the city centre.

MERSEYRAIL

Merseyrail (☎ 702 2071; www.merseyrail.org) is an extensive suburban rail service linking Liverpool with the Greater Merseyside area. There are four stops in the city centre: Lime St, Central (handy for Ropewalks), James St (close to Albert Dock) and Moorfields (for the Western Approaches Museum).

Taxi

Mersey Cabs (☎ 298 2222) operates tourist taxi services and has some cabs adapted for disabled visitors.

AROUND LIVERPOOL

PORT SUNLIGHT

Located southwest of Liverpool across the River Mersey on the Wirral Peninsula, Port Sunlight is a picturesque 19th-century village created by the philanthropic Lever family to house workers in its soap factory. The main reason to come here is the wonderful **Lady Lever Art Gallery** (☎ 0151-478 4136; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ladylever; off Greendale Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), where you can see some of the greatest works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as well as some fine examples of Wedgwood pottery.

Take the Merseyrail to Bebington on the Wirral line; the gallery is a five-minute walk from the station; alternatively, bus 51 from Woodside will get you there.

SPEKE

A marvellous example of a black-and-white half-timbered hall can be visited at **Speke Hall** (NT; ☎ 0151-427 7231; www.spekehall.org.uk; admission £6.50; 🕒 1-5.30pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), 6 miles south of Liverpool in the plain suburb of Speke. It contains several priest's holes where 16th-century Roman Catholic priests could hide when they were forbidden to hold Masses. Any airport bus from Paradise St will drop you within a half-mile of the entrance. Speke Hall can also be combined with a National Trust–run, 1½-hour **tour** (☎ 486 4006; with Speke Hall adult/child £12/free) to the childhood homes of both Lennon and McCartney (see the boxed text, p578) – you can book at Speke Hall or at the tourist offices in Liverpool.

LANCASHIRE

Industrious, isolated Lancashire has a touch of everything, from mighty Manchester in the south – so big that it's administered separately (and given its own section in this chapter) – to the Ribble Valley in the north, a gentle and beautiful warm-up for the Lake District beyond its northern border. Just north of the Ribble Valley is the handsome Georgian county town of Lancaster and, to the west, the ever-popular Blackpool, empress of the tacky, traditional English seaside resorts.

BLACKPOOL

☎ 01253 / pop 142,290

The queen bee of England's fun-by-the-sea-type resorts is unquestionably Blackpool. It's unashamedly bold and brazen in its efforts to cement its position as the country's second-most visited town after London. Tacky, trashy and, in recent years, a little bit tawdry, Blackpool doesn't care because 16 million people don't either.

Blackpool works so well because it has mastered the time-tested, traditional British holiday-by-the-sea formula with hi-tech, 21st-century amusements that will thrill even the most cynical observer. Basically, a holiday here is all about pure, unadulterated fun.

The town is famous for its tower; its three piers; its Pleasure Beach; and its Illuminations, a successful ploy to extend the brief summer holiday season. From early September to early November, 5 miles of the Promenade are illuminated with thousands of electric and neon lights.

Orientation & Information

Blackpool is surprisingly spread out, but can still be managed easily without a car; trams run the entire 7-mile length of the seafront Promenade.

Tourist office (www.visitblackpool.com); Central Promenade (☎ 403223; 🕒 9.15am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.15am-4.15pm Sun Apr-Sep); Clifton St (☎ 478222; 1 Clifton St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

PLEASURE BEACH

The main reason for Blackpool's immense popularity is the simply fantastic **Pleasure Beach** (☎ 0870 444 5566; www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com; admission free; 🕒 from 10am Apr-early Nov), a 16-hectare collection of more than 145 different rides that attracts some 7 million visitors annually. As amusement parks go, this is the best you'll find anywhere in Europe.

The park's major rides include the Big One, the tallest and fastest roller coaster in Europe, reaching 85mph before hitting a near-vertical descent of 75m; the Ice Blast, which delivers you up a 65m steel tower before returning to earth at 80mph; and, new in 2004, Bling, where riders are brought 40m into the air and then spun 360 degrees at 60mph – it's the perfect way to shift the contents of your stomach.

The hi-tech, modern rides draw the biggest queues, but spare a moment to check out the marvellous collection of old-style wooden roller coasters, known as 'woodies'. You can see the world's first Big Dipper (1923), but be sure to have a go on the Grand National (1935), whose carriages trundle along a 1½-mile track in an experience that is typically Blackpool – complete with riders waving their hands (despite the sombre-toned announcement not to).

Rides are divided into categories and you can buy tickets for individual categories or for a mixture of them all. An unlimited ticket to all rides costs £29 for one day, £43 for two.

There are no set closing times; it depends how busy it is.

OTHER SIGHTS

Blackpool's most recognisable landmark is the 150m-high **Blackpool Tower** (☎ 622242; www.theblackpooltower.co.uk; adult/child £12.95/8.95; 🕒 10am-6pm), built in 1894. Inside is a vast entertainment complex that should keep the kids happy, including a dinosaur ride, Europe's largest indoor jungle gym and a Moorish circus.

The highlight is the magnificent rococo **ballroom** (🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri & Sun, to 11pm Sat), with extraordinary sculptured and gilded plasterwork, murals, chandeliers and couples gliding across the beautifully polished wooden floor to the melodramatic tones of a huge Wurlitzer organ.

Across from Pleasure Beach is **Sandcastle Waterworld** (☎ 343602; adult/child £10.50/8.50; 🕒 from 10am daily May-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Feb), an indoor water complex complete with its own rides. Forget the beach – this is the most pleasant place to have a swim.

Of the three Victorian piers, the most famous – and the longest – is the **North Pier**, built in 1862 and opened a year later charging a penny admission. Today admission to its plethora of assorted rides and attractions is free.

Near the Central Pier is the state-of-the-art **Sealife Centre** (☎ 622445; New Bonny St; adult/child £8.95/6; 🕒 10am-8pm), which features 2.5m-long sharks and a giant octopus.

Sleeping

With more than 2500 hotels, B&Bs and self-catering units, Blackpool knows how to put visitors up for the night. Even so, it is worth booking ahead during the Illuminations. If you want to stay close to the waterfront, prepare for a noisy, boisterous night; accommodation along Albert and Hornby Rds, 300m back from the sea, is that little bit quieter. The tourist offices will assist you in finding a bed.

Big Blue Hotel (☎ 0845 367 3333; www.bigbluehotel.uk.com; Blackpool Pleasure Beach; s/d/ste from £65/75/149; Ⓟ) Cool, minimalist and very much a look into Blackpool's future, this hotel caters to 21st-century demands: smartly kitted-out rooms come with DVD players and computer games, while its location at the southern entrance to Pleasure Beach should ensure that everyone has something to do.

Number One (☎ 343901; www.numberoneblackpool.com; 1 St Lukes Rd; s/d from £70/120; Ⓟ) Far fancier than anything else around, this stunning boutique guesthouse is all luxury and contemporary style. Everything exudes a kind of discreet elegance, from the dark-wood furniture and high-end mod cons to the top-notch breakfast. It's on a quiet road set just back from the South Promenade near Pleasure Beach.

Eating

Forget gourmet meals – the Blackpool experience is all about stuffing your face with burgers, doughnuts and fish and chips. Most people eat at their hotels where roast and three vegetables often costs just £5 a head.

There are a few restaurants around Talbot Sq (near the tourist office) on Queen St, Talbot Rd and Clifton St. The most interesting possibility is the Afro-Caribbean **Lagoonda** (☎ 293837; 37 Queen St; mains £8-10), a friendly, no-nonsense eatery that serves up colourful (and often spicy) dishes with a tropical flavour.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The central coach station is on Talbot Rd, near the town centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£7.80, 1½ hours, one daily), London (£25, 6½ hours, five daily) and Manchester (£6.20, 1¾ hours, five daily).

TRAIN

The main train station is Blackpool North, about five blocks east of the North Pier on Talbot Rd. There is a direct service from Manchester (£11.75, 1¼ hours, half-hourly) and Liverpool (£12.60, 1½ hours, seven daily), but most other arrivals change in Preston (£5.65, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

Getting Around

A host of travel-card options for trams and buses ranging from one day to a week are available at the tourist offices and most newsagents. With more than 14,000 car-parking spaces in Blackpool, you'll have no problem parking.

LANCASTER

☎ 01524 / pop 45,960

Lined with handsome Georgian buildings, Lancaster does a good job of representing Lancashire as its county seat and, for our purposes, as a decent stopover on the way to the Ribble Valley. Folks have done business here since Roman times, none more successfully than during the 18th century, when Lancaster was an important port in the slave trade.

Information

Post office (85 Market St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 841656; www.citycoastcountryside.co.uk; 29 Castle Hill; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

LANCASTER CASTLE & PRIORY

Lancaster's imposing **castle** (☎ 64998; www.lancastercastle.com; admission £5; 🕑 10am-5pm) was originally built in 1150. Later additions include the **Well Tower**, more commonly known as the Witches' Tower because it was used to incarcerate the accused of the famous Pendle Witches Trial of 1612, and the impressive twin-towered **gatehouse** – both of which were added in the 14th century. Most of what you see today, however, dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, when the castle was substantially altered to suit its new, and still current, role as a prison. Consequently, you can only visit the castle as part of a 45-minute **guided tour** (🕑 every 30min, 10.30am-4pm), but you do get a chance to experience what it was like to be locked up in the dungeon.

Immediately next to the castle is the equally fine **priory church** (☎ 65338; admission free; 🕑 9.30am-5pm), founded in 1094 but extensively remodelled in the Middle Ages.

OTHER SIGHTS

The steps between the castle and the church lead down to the 17th-century **Judges' Lodgings** (☎ 32808; admission £3; 🕑 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat Jul-Sep, 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun). Once the home of witch-hunter Thomas Covell (he who 'caught' the poor Pendle women), it is now home to a Museum of Furnishings by master builders Gillows of Lancaster (whose work graces the Houses of Parliament) and a Museum of Childhood, which has memorabilia from the turn of the 20th century.

A couple of other museums complete the picture: the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 64637; St George's Quay; admission £3; 🕑 11am-5pm Easter-Oct, 12.30-4pm Nov-Easter), in the 18th-century Custom House, recalls the days when Lancaster was a flourishing port at the centre of the slave trade; and the **City Museum** (☎ 64637; Market Sq; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which has a mixed bag of local historical and archaeological exhibits.

Lancaster's highest point is the 22-hectare spread of **Williamson Park** (www.williamsonpark.com; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11-4pm Nov-Easter), from which there are great views of the town, Morecambe Bay and the Cumbrian fells to the north. In the middle of the park is the **Ashton Memorial**, a 67m baroque folly built by Lord Ashton (the son of the park's founder, James Williamson) for his wife. More beautiful, however, is the Edwardian Palm House, now the **Tropical Butterfly House** (adult/child £4.25/2.75; 🕑 same hours as park), full of exotic and stunning species. Take bus 25 or 25A from the station, or else it's a steep three-quarter-mile walk up Moor Lane.

Sleeping & Eating

Sun Hotel & Bar (☎ 66006; www.thesunhotelandbar.co.uk; 63 Church St; s/d from £40/60; Ⓟ) An excellent hotel in a 300-year-old building with a rustic, old-world look that stops at the bedroom door; a recent renovation has resulted in eight pretty snazzy sleeping quarters. The pub downstairs is one of the best in town and a top spot for a bit of grub; there are three different menus to choose from, with meals from £8 to £15.

Royal King's Arms Hotel (☎ 32451; www.swallow-hotels.com; Market St; s/d from £55/80; Ⓟ) Lancaster's top hotel is a period house with modern, comfortable rooms and an all-round businesslike interior. Look out for the beautiful stained-glass windows, one of the only leftovers from the mid-19th century when Charles Dickens frequented the place. The hotel restaurant is an excellent dining choice (mains around £11).

Old John of Gaunt (☎ 32358; 53 Market St; mains around £5-6) Your one stop for traditional pub grub, decent ale and live music.

Getting There & Away

Lancaster is on the main west-coast railway line and on the Cumbrian coast line. Destinations include Carlisle (£21, one hour, hourly), Manchester (£12.20, one hour, hourly) and Morecambe (15 minutes, half-hourly).

ISLE OF MAN

Mainlanders have long suspected the Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin in Manx) of being an odd place, full of weird island folk and their quirky ways. As 'evidence' they'll point to the island's reputation as a tax haven for wealthy Brits and its summer season of Tourist Trophy (TT) motorbike racing, which every May and June attracts around 50,000 petrol heads. Hardly case closed.

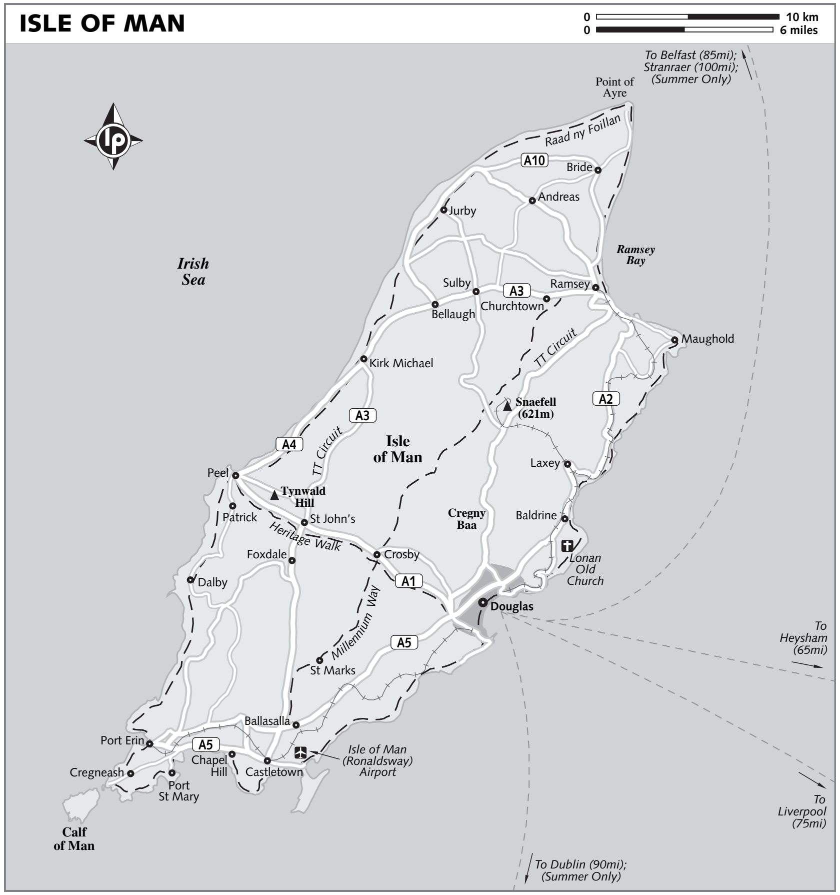
Chances are that those same mainlanders have never actually seen the lush valleys, barren hills and rugged coastlines of what is a surprisingly beautiful island. Perfect for walking, cycling, driving or just relaxing, this is a place that doggedly refuses to sell itself down the river of crass commercialism and mass tourism. Needless to say, if you want a slice of silence, be sure to avoid the TT races, which turn the place into a high-rev bike fest.

Orientation & Information

Situated in the Irish Sea, equidistant from Liverpool, Dublin and Belfast, the Isle of Man is about 33 miles long by 13 miles wide. Ferries arrive at Douglas, the port and main town on the southeast coast. Flights come in to Ronaldsway airport, 10 miles south of Douglas. Most of the island's historic sites are operated by Manx Heritage, which offers free admission to National Trust or English Heritage members. Unless otherwise indicated, **Manx Heritage** (MH; ☎ 01624-648000; www.gov.im/mnh) sites are open 10am to 5pm daily, Easter to October. The Manx Heritage 4 Site Pass (adult/child £10/5) grants you entry into four of the island's heritage attractions; pick it up at any of the tourist offices.

Walking & Cycling

There are plenty of walking trails. Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger Map 95 (£6.49) covers the whole island, while the free *Walks on the Isle of Man* is available from the tourist office in Douglas. The **Millennium Way** is a walking path that runs the length of the island amid some spectacular scenery. The most demanding of all the island's walks is the 95-mile **Raad ny Foillan** (Road of the Gull), a well-marked path that makes a complete circuit of the island and normally takes about five days to complete. The **Isle of Man Walking Festival** (www.isleofmanwalking.com) takes place over five days in June. It only kicked off in 2004,



but it has already proven a favourite with walkers from all over Britain.

There are six designated off-road cycling tracks on the island, each with varying ranges of difficulty.

The island is also home to the **International Cycling Week Festival**, which takes place in mid-July. It's a pretty serious affair, attracting top cyclists from around the world as well as enthusiastic Sunday racers. Check with the tourist office in Douglas for details.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ronaldsway Airport (☎ 01624-821600; www.iom-airport.com; Ballasalla) is 10 miles south of Douglas near Castletown. Buses link the airport with Douglas every 30 minutes between 7am and 11pm; a taxi should cost you no more than £18. Airline contacts:

Aer Arann (☎ 0800 587 23 24; www.aerarann.com) From London Luton and Dublin.

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) From London Gatwick, Luton and Manchester.

British Northwest Airlines (☎ 0800 083 7783; www.flybnwa.co.uk) From Blackpool.

Eastern Airways (☎ 01652-681099; www.easternairways.com) From Leeds-Bradford, Bristol, Birmingham and East Midlands.

Emerald Airways (☎ 0870 850 5400; www.flyjem.com) From Liverpool.

EuroManx Airlines (☎ 0870 787 7879; www.euromanx.com) From Belfast, Liverpool, London City and Manchester.

Flybe (☎ 0871 700 0535; www.flybe.com) From Birmingham.

Loganair (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.loganair.com) From Glasgow Prestwick; linked with British Airways.

BOAT

Isle of Man Steam Packet (☎ 0870 552 3523; www.steam-packet.com; foot passenger single/return £15/30, car & 2 passengers return £138) is a car ferry and high-speed catamaran service from Liverpool and Heysham to Douglas. There is also a summer service to Dublin (three hours, mid-April to mid-September).

Getting Around

The island has a comprehensive bus service; the tourist office in Douglas has timetables and sells tickets. It also sells the **Island Explorer** (adult/child 1-day £10/5, 3-day £20/10), which gives you free transport for the apposite period on all public transport, including the tram to Snaefell and Douglas' horse-trams.

Bikes can be hired from **Eurocycles** (☎ 01624-624909; 8a Victoria Rd; per day £14-18; 🕒 Mon-Sat).

Petrol heads will love the scenic, sweeping bends that make for some exciting driving – and the fact that outside of Douglas town there's no speed limit. Naturally, the most popular drive is along the TT route. Car-hire operators have desks at the airport, and charge from £30 per day.

The 19th-century electric and steam **rail services** (☎ 01624-663366; 🕒 Easter-Sep) are a thoroughly satisfying way of getting from A to B:

Douglas–Castletown–Port Erin Steam Train (£8.40 return)

Douglas–Laxey–Ramsey Electric Tramway (£5.20 return)

Laxey–Summit Snaefell Mountain Railway (£7.40 return)

DOUGLAS

☎ 01624 / pop 22,200

All roads lead to Douglas, which is a bit of a shame, as the town isn't all that endearing. Still, it has the best of the island's hotels and restaurants – as well as the bulk of the finance houses frequented so regularly by tax-allergic Brits. The **tourist office** (☎ 686766; www.visitisleofman.com; Sea Terminal Bldg; 🕒 9.15am-7pm daily May-Sep, 9am-5pm daily Apr & Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 9am-12.30pm Sat Nov-Mar) makes accommodation bookings for free.

The **Manx Museum** (MH; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) gives an introduction to everything from the island's prehistoric past to the latest TT race winners.

Sleeping & Eating

The seafront promenade is crammed with B&Bs. Unless you booked back in the 1990s, however, there's little chance of finding accommodation during TT week and the weeks each side of it. The tourist office's camping information sheet lists sites all around the island.

Admiral House (☎ 629551; www.admiralhouse.com; Loch Promenade; s/d £50/80; 🅿) Newly refurbished to a high standard of comfort, this elegant guesthouse overlooks the harbour near the ferry port. The 23 spotless and modern rooms are a cheerful alternative to the worn look of a lot of other seafront B&Bs. In the basement, the smart Ciapelli's is a top-notch Italian restaurant that is probably the best eatery in town, serving mains for around £9 to £12.

Sefton Hotel (☎ 645500; www.seftonhotel.co.im; Harris Promenade; s/d from £80/90; 🅿) Douglas' best hotel is an upmarket oasis with its own indoor water garden and rooms that range from plain and comfy to elegant and very luxurious. The rooms overlooking the water garden are superb, even better than the ones with sea views. You'll save up to 10% if you book online.

Claremont (☎ 698800; www.sleepwellhotels.com; 18-19 Loch Promenade; d/ste £105/140; 🅿 💻) The last word in contemporary business style in Douglas, the Claremont has very bright, airy rooms with all the latest gizmos – DVD players, internet connections and fancy TVs – as well as beautiful limestone bathrooms. The executive rooms have terrific harbour views.

Spill the Beans (☎ 614167; 1 Market Hill; snacks £2-4; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) The most pleasant coffee shop in Douglas delivers proper caffeine kicks as well as cakes, buns and other sweet snacks.

Tanroagan (☎ 472411; 9 Ridgeway St; mains £9-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner only Sat) The place for all things from the sea, this elegant eatery is the trendiest place in Douglas, serving fresh fish straight off the boats, given the merest of Continental twists or just a spell on the hot grill. Reservations are recommended.

Drinking

There are a few good pubs around, including the trendy **Bar George** (☎ 617799; St George's Chambers, 3 Hill St) and the originally named **Rover's Return** (☎ 676459; 11 Church St), specialising in the local brew, Bushy Ales.

AROUND DOUGLAS

You can follow the TT course up and over the mountain or wind around the coast. The mountain route goes close to the summit of **Snaefell** (621m), the island's highest point. It's an easy walk up to the summit, or take the electric tram from Laxey on the coast.

On the edge of Ramsey is the **Grove Rural Life Museum** (MH; admission £3; ⏰ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct). The church in the small village of **Maughold** is on the site of an ancient monastery; a small shelter houses quite a good selection of stone crosses and ancient inscriptions.

It's no exaggeration to describe the **Lady Isabella Laxey Wheel** (MH; admission £3), built in 1854 to pump water from a mine, as a 'great' wheel; it measures 22m across and can draw 1140L of water per minute from a depth of 550m. Named after the wife of the then lieutenant-governor, it's the largest wheel of its kind in the world. The wheel-headed cross at **Lonan Old Church** is the island's most impressive early Christian cross.

CASTLETOWN & AROUND

At the southern end of the island is Castletown, a quiet harbour town that was originally the capital of the Isle of Man. The town is dominated by the impressive 13th-century **Castle Rushen** (MH; admission £4.25). The flag tower affords fine views of the town and coast. There's also a small **Nautical Museum** (MH; admission £3) displaying, among other things, its pride and joy, *Peggy*, a boat built in 1791 and still housed in its original boathouse. There is a school dating back to 1570 in **St Mary's church** (MH; admission free) behind the castle.

Between Castletown and Cregneash, the Iron Age hillfort at **Chapel Hill** encloses a Viking ship burial site.

On the southern tip of the island, the **Cregneash Village Folk Museum** (MH; admission £3) recalls traditional Manx rural life. The **Calf of Man**, the small island just off Cregneash, is a bird sanctuary. **Calf Island Cruises** (☎ 01624-832339; adult/child £10/5; ⏰ 10.15am, 11.30am & 1.30pm Apr-Oct weather permitting) runs between Port Erin and the island.

Port Erin, another Victorian seaside resort, plays host to the small **Railway Museum** (admission £1; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm daily Apr-Oct) depicting the history of steam railway on the island.

Port Erin has a good range of accommodation, as does Port St Mary, across the headland and linked by steam train.

The splendid Victorian-style **Aaron House** (☎ 01624-835702; www.aaronhouse.co.uk; The Promenade, Port St Mary; s/d from £35/70) is a B&B that has fussed over every detail, from the gorgeous brass beds and claw-foot baths to the old-fashioned photographs on the walls; it's like stepping back in time, minus the inconvenience of cold and discomfort. The sea views are sensational.

PEEL & AROUND

The west coast's most appealing town, Peel has a fine sandy beach, but its real attraction is the 11th-century **Peel Castle** (MH; admission £3), stunningly positioned atop St Patrick's Island and joined to Peel by a causeway.

The excellent **House of Manannan** (MH; admission £5; ⏰ 10am-5pm year-round) museum uses interactive displays to explain Manx history and its seafaring traditions. A combined ticket for both the castle and museum costs £7.

Three miles east of Peel is **Tynwald Hill** at St John's, where the annual parliamentary ceremony takes place on 5 July.

Peel has several B&Bs, including the **Fernleigh Hotel** (☎ 01624-842435; www.isleofman.com/accommodation/fernleigh; Marine Pde; r per person from £21; ⏰ Feb-Nov), which has 12 decent bedrooms; prices include breakfast. For a better-than-average bite, head for the **Creek Inn** (☎ 01624-842216; jeanmcaleer@manx.net; East Quay; mains around £8), opposite the House of Manannan, which serves Manx queenies (scallops served with white cheese sauce) and has self-catering rooms from £35.

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Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds & Gloucestershire

One of the most visited parts of Britain, Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire offer old-world English charm by the bucketload and a diverse range of headline attractions across the lush, rolling hills of the region. Little changed since medieval times, the Cotswolds are probably the area's biggest draw, their picture-postcard villages overflowing with implausibly picturesque thatched cottages, flower-strewn gardens, graceful stone churches and gorgeous views in every direction.

However, the region has far more than bucolic views and rural retreats to offer. To the east, the weight of academic achievement seeps from the very walls of the beautiful college buildings in Oxford, the museums are full of ancient artefacts and the hushed reverence is only broken by the laughter of unruly students who ensure there's always lively nightlife. Just north of here Churchill's extraordinary pile, Blenheim Palace, is set in glorious grounds, and to the west of the region the Regency grandeur and genteel atmosphere of Cheltenham draw the crowds. Nearby, Gloucester's magnificent cathedral is the town's crowning glory, while higgledy-piggledy Tudor character can be found in riverside Tewkesbury.

This wealth of attractions, high-quality accommodation and glorious countryside can mean serious crowds in the summer months and the shameless peddling of nostalgia in many villages. Get on your bike or take to the hills on foot, however, and it's easy to leave the crowds behind and discover a legion of rarely visited villages just bursting with charm.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Soaking up the studious calm and weight of academic achievement at **Oxford University** (p345)
- Wandering the sumptuous rooms and gardens of **Blenheim Palace** (p354)
- Hanging out at one of the many festivals in graceful **Cheltenham** (p370)
- Marvelling at the magnificent cloisters of **Gloucester Cathedral** (p366)
- Getting lost on the winding roads of the **Cotswolds** (p356)
- Going medieval with a tankard of ale at the **Falkland Arms** (p359) in Great Tew

Gloucester
Cheltenham
Great Tew
Blenheim Palace
The Cotswolds
Oxford

■ POPULATION: 1.2 MILLION

■ AREA: 2222 SQ MILES

Activities

Walking or cycling through the Cotswolds is an ideal way to get away from the crowds and discover some of the lesser-known vistas and villages of the region. For more information, see the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83) or specific suggestions for walks and rides throughout this chapter.

CYCLING

Gentle gradients and scenic vistas make the Cotswolds ideal for cycling, with only the steep western escarpment offering a challenge to the legs. Plenty of quiet country lanes and gated roads crisscross the region or follow the way-marked **Thames Valley Cycle Way**, part of the National Cycle Network (see boxed text, p88).

Mountain bikers can use a variety of bridleways in the **Cotswolds** and **Chilterns**, and in the west of the region the **Forest of Dean** has many dirt-track options, and some dedicated mountain-bike trails.

WALKING

The **Cotswold Hills** offer endless opportunities for day hikes, but if you're looking for something more ambitious, the **Cotswold Way** (www.cotswold-way.co.uk) is an absolute classic. The route covers 102 miles from Bath to Chipping Campden and takes about a week to walk.

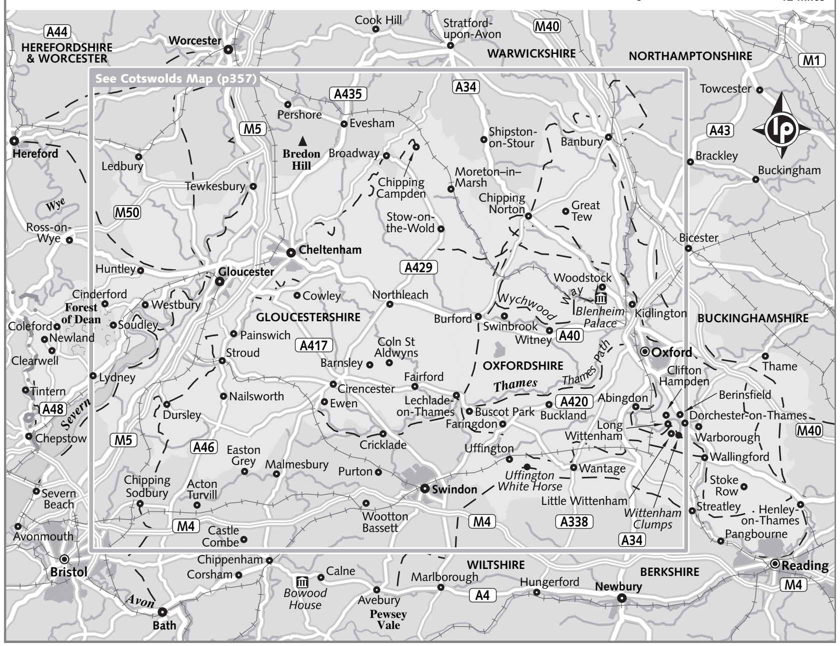
Alternatively, the **Thames Path** (www.thames-path.co.uk) follows the river downstream from its source near Cirencester to London. It takes about two weeks to complete the 173-mile route, but there's a very enjoyable five-day section from near Cirencester to Oxford.

OXFORDSHIRE

A region of old money, scholarly pursuits, thatched roofs and undulating hills, Oxfordshire is a well-bred, well-preened kind of place with plenty of rustic charm and headline attractions.

The county is dominated by its world-renowned university town, a genteel city soaked in history and full of august buildings, gowned cyclists, ivy-clad quads and dusty academics. Yet Oxfordshire is so much more than its university suggests. It is also home to the extravagant Baroque pile Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir

OXFORDSHIRE & GLOUCESTERSHIRE


0 20 km
0 12 miles
See Cotswolds Map (p357)
HEREFORDSHIRE & WORCESTER
WARWICKSHIRE
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
OXFORDSHIRE
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
WILTSHIRE
BERKSHIRE
Worcester
Cook Hill
Stratford-upon-Avon
Towcester
Pershore
Evesham
Bredon Hill
Broadway
Shipston-on-Stour
Banbury
Hereford
Ledbury
Tewkesbury
Chipping Campden
Moreton-in-Marsh
Chipping Norton
Great Tew
Brackley
Buckingham
Ross-on-Wye
Wye
Stow-on-the-Wold
Cheltenham
Bicester
Huntley
Gloucester
Cinderford
Forest of Dean
Westbury
Cowley
Northleach
Woodstock
Wychwood Way
Blenheim Palace
Kidlington
Coleford
Soudley
Newland
Painswick
Burford
Swinbrook
Witney
Oxford
Clearwell
Stroud
Coln St Aldwyns
Barnsley
Fairford
Thames Path
Clifton Hampden
Thame
Tintern
Lydney
Nailsworth
Cirencester
Ewen
Lechlade-on-Thames
Buscot Park
Buckland
Abingdon
Berinsfield
Dorchester-on-Thames
Dursley
Faringdon
Long Wittenham
Warborough
Chepstow
Severn
Cricklade
Wallingford
Easton Grey
Malmesbury
Purton
Uffington
Wantage
Chipping Sodbury
Acton Turvill
Swindon
Uffington White Horse
Stoke Row
Severn Beach
Little Wittenham
Wittenham Clumps
Streatley
Henley-on-Thames
Wootton Bassett
Pangbourne
Avonmouth
Castle Combe
Bristol
Chippenham
Corsham
Calne
Marlborough
Hungerford
Newbury
Reading
Bowood House
Avebury
Avon
Pewsey Vale
Bath
A44
M40
M1
A435
A34
M5
A43
M50
A429
A40
A417
A420
A48
M5
A46
M4
A338
A34
M4
A4
M4
M40

Winston Churchill, and affluent Henley-on-Thames, an elegant riverside town that hosts the ever-so-stylish Henley Royal Regatta each year. Near here is the mysterious giant Uffington White Horse, carved from the limestone hills, and a smattering of quaint traditional villages oozing the gentle charm of middle England.

Activities

As well as the long-distance national trails, walkers may be interested in the **Oxfordshire Way**, a scenic 65-mile waymarked trail running from Bourton-on-the-Water to Henley-on-Thames, and the **Wychwood Way**, a historic 37-mile route from Woodstock, which runs through an ancient royal forest. The routes are divided up into manageable sections described in leaflets available from most local tourist offices and libraries.

The quiet roads and gentle gradients also make Oxfordshire good cycling country. The main waymarked route through the county is the **Oxfordshire Cycleway**, which takes in Woodstock, Burford and Henley. If you don't have your own wheels you can hire bikes in Oxford (see p353).

You'll find information about all walking and cycling routes in the county at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside.

Getting Around

You can pick up bus and train timetables for most routes at local tourist offices. The main train stations are in Oxford and Banbury and have frequent connections to London Paddington and Euston, Hereford, Birmingham, Bristol and Scotland.

The main bus operators are the **Oxford Bus Company** (☎ 01865-785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) and **Stagecoach** (☎ 01865-772250; www.stagecoachbus.com/oxfordshire). If you plan to do a lot of travelling by bus, Stagecoach offers one-/seven-/14-day bus passes for unlimited use of its services in southern Britain (excluding London) for £6/18/34.

Alternatively, **Cotswold Roaming** (☎ 01865-308300; www.cotswold-roaming.co.uk) runs guided bus tours from Oxford between April and October.

OXFORD

☎ 01865 / pop 143,016

Bookish, conservative, closeted and elite, Oxford is a privileged place, highly aware of its international standing as one of the world's most famous university towns and yet remarkably restrained for a city driven by its student population. It's the kind of place where the pursuit of excellence, the weight of academic achievement and the whiff of intellectual ideals is palpable as soon as you get off the bus.

Thirty-nine colleges make up the university, their elegant honey-coloured buildings wrapping around winding cobbled streets and attracting hordes of tourists each year. Yet despite the rushing traffic and throngs of people, inside their jealously guarded quadrangles an aura of studious calm descends. The oldest colleges date back almost 750 years and little has changed inside the hallowed walls since then.

Yet the university is only part of Oxford's story; long before Mensa was ever born the Morris motorcar was rolling off production lines in Cowley, and today the university's academic elite are still far outnumbered by the real-world majority. Butting up against all that fine architecture, the celebrated libraries, world-class museums and historic pubs is an increasingly urbane city flush with chic restaurants, trendy bars and exclusive shops.

History

Strategically placed at the confluence of the River Cherwell and the Thames (called the Isis here, from the Latin *Tamesis*), Oxford was a key Saxon town that grew dramatically in importance when Henry II banned Anglo-Norman students from attending the Sorbonne in 1167. Students soon flocked to Oxford's Augustinian abbey in droves.

The new students managed to create a lasting enmity with the local townspeople, culminating in the St Scholastica's Day Massacre in 1355 (see the boxed text, p348). Thereafter, the king ordered that the university be broken up into colleges, each of which then developed its own traditions. The first colleges were built in the 13th century, with at least three more being added in each of the following three centuries. Newer colleges, such as Keble, were added in the 19th and 20th centuries, and today there are 39 colleges catering for over 18,000 students.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the canal system in 1790 created a link with the industrial Midlands, and work and trade suddenly expanded beyond the academic core. However, the city's real industrial boom came when William Morris began producing cars here in 1913. The Bullnose Morris and the Morris Minor were both produced in the Cowley factories to the east of the city where BMW's new Mini runs off the production line today.

Orientation

Oxford is fairly compact and can easily be covered on foot. Carfax Tower makes a good central landmark and is a short walk from the bus and train stations, which are conveniently located close to the centre of town.

The university buildings are scattered throughout the city, with the most important and architecturally significant in the centre. Jericho, in the northwest, is the trendy, artsy end of town, with slick bars and restaurants and an art-house cinema, while Cowley Rd, southeast of Carfax, is the edgy student and immigrant area packed with cheap places to eat and drink.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Blackwell (☎ 792792; www.blackwell.co.uk; 48-51 Broad St) 'The Knowledge Retailer' stocks any book you could ever need.

Little Bookshop (☎ 559176; Ave 2, Covered Market) Tiny shop bursting with first editions and rare books.

QI (Quite Interesting; ☎ 261507; www.qi.com; 16 Turl St) 'Ridiculously well-read and over-educated' staff to help you trawl through specially chosen titles.

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 0845 8 505 505)

INTERNET ACCESS

Mices (☎ 726364; 118 High St; per 20min £1; 🕘 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) There's another branch on Gloucester Green.

Virgin (☎ 723906; 18-20 Cornmarket St; per 20min £1; 🕘 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Daily Info (www.dailyinfo.co.uk) Daily listings for events, gigs, performances, accommodation and jobs.

Oxford City (www.oxfordcity.co.uk) Accommodation and restaurant listings as well as entertainment, activities and shopping.

Oxford Online (www.visitoxford.org) Oxford's official tourism website.

LAUNDRY

Coin Wash (127 Cowley Rd; per load £3; 🕘 9am-9pm Mon-Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

John Radcliffe Hospital (☎ 741166; Headley Way, Headington) Three miles east of the city centre.

MONEY

Every major bank and ATM is represented on or near Cornmarket St.

POST

Post office (☎ 223344; 102 St Aldate's; 🕘 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 726871; www.visitoxford.org; 15-16 Broad St; 🕘 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) The tourist office stocks a *Welcome to Oxford* (£1) brochure, which has a walking tour with college opening times, as well as the *University of Oxford* leaflet and *Oxford Accessible Guide* for travellers with disabilities. Also look out for *In Oxford*, a free publication that lists events, museums, restaurants and accommodation options. The centre can book accommodation for a £4 fee plus a 10% deposit.

UNIVERSITIES

Oxford Brookes (☎ 741111; www.brookes.ac.uk; Gipsy Lane) Oxford's lesser-known university.

Oxford University (☎ 270000; www.ox.ac.uk)

Sights

UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS & COLLEGES

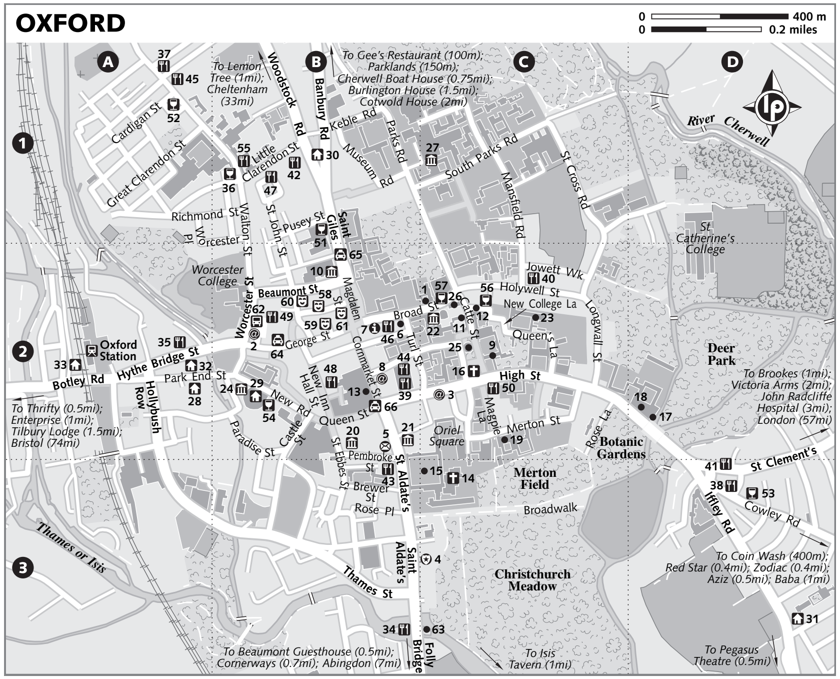
Christ Church College

The largest and grandest of all of Oxford's colleges, **Christ Church** (☎ 276492; www.visitchristchurch.net; St Aldate's; adult/under 16yr £4.70/3.70; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) is also its most popular. The magnificent buildings, illustrious history and latter-day fame as a location for the Harry Potter films has tourists coming in droves.

The college was founded in 1525 by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey – who suppressed 22 monasteries to acquire the funds for his lavish building project – and over the years numerous luminaries have been educated here. Albert Einstein, philosopher John Locke, poet WH Auden and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) all studied here, as did 13 British prime ministers.

The main entrance is below imposing **Tom Tower**, the upper part of which was designed by former student Sir Christopher Wren. Great Tom, the 7-ton tower bell, still chimes 101 times each evening at 9.05pm (Oxford is five minutes west of Greenwich), to sound the curfew imposed on the original 101 students.

Mere visitors, however, are not allowed to enter the college this way and must go further down St Aldate's to the side entrance. Immediately on entering is the 15th-century cloister, a relic of the ancient Priory of St Frideswide, whose shrine was a focus of


OXFORD
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To Lemon Tree (1mi); Cheltenham (33mi)
To Gee's Restaurant (100m); Parklands (150m); Cherwell Boat House (0.75mi); Burlington House (1.5mi); Cotwold House (2mi)
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Banbury Rd
Keble Rd
Parks Rd
Museum Rd
South Parks Rd
Mansfield Rd
St Cross Rd
River Cherwell
Cardigan St
Great Clarendon St
Little Clarendon St
Richmond St
Walton St
St John St
Pusey St
Saint Giles
Worcester Pl
Worcester College
Worcester St
Beaumont St
Magdalen St
Broad St
Catte St
Holywell St
Jowett Wk
New College La
Queen's La
Longwall St
St Catherine's College
Deer Park
Oxford Station
Botley Rd
Hythe Bridge St
Park End St
Hollybush Row
George St
Cornmarket St
Turl St
New Inn Hall St
New Rd
Castle St
Paradise St
Queen St
St Ebbes St
Pembroke St
Brewer St
Rose Pl
St Aldate's
Oriel Square
Magpie La
Merton St
High St
Rose La
Botanic Gardens
Merton Field
Broadwalk
Christchurch Meadow
St Clement's
Iffley Rd
Cowley Rd
Thames or Isis
Thames St
Saint Aldate's
Folly Bridge
To Thrifty (0.5mi); Enterprise (1mi); Tilbury Lodge (1.5mi); Bristol (74mi)
To Brookes (1mi); Victoria Arms (2mi); John Radcliffe Hospital (3mi); London (57mi)
To Coin Wash (400m); Red Star (0.4mi); Zodiac (0.4mi); Aziz (0.5mi); Baba (1mi)
To Beaumont Guesthouse (0.5mi); Cornerways (0.7mi); Abingdon (7mi)
To Isis Tavern (1mi)
To Pegasus Theatre (0.5mi)
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pilgrimage. From here you go up to the **Great Hall**, the college's magnificent dining room, with its hammer-beam roof and imposing portraits of past scholars.

Coming down the grand staircase you'll enter **Tom Quad**, Oxford's largest quadrangle, which was used as a cattle pen by Royalist forces during the Civil War. From the quad you enter **Christ Church Cathedral**, the smallest cathedral in the country. Inside, brawny Norman columns are topped by elegant vaulting, while beautiful stained-glass windows adorn the walls. Look out for a rare depiction of the murder of Thomas Becket.

You can also explore another two quads and the **Picture Gallery**, with its modest collection of Renaissance art. To the south of the college is **Christ Church Meadow**, a leafy expanse bordered by the Isis and Cherwell rivers and ideal for leisurely walking.

Magdalen College

Set amid a hundred acres of lawns, woodlands, river walks and deer park, **Magdalen** (☎ 276000; www.magd.ox.ac.uk; High St; adult/under 16yr £3/2; 🕒 noon-6pm Jul-Sep, 1pm-dusk Oct-Jun), pronounced *mawd-len*, is one of the wealthiest and most beautiful of Oxford's colleges.

An elegant Victorian gateway leads into a medieval chapel with its glorious 15th-century tower, and on to the remarkable cloisters, some of the finest in Oxford. The strange gargoyles and carved figures here are said to have inspired CS Lewis' stone statues in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Behind the cloisters the lovely Addison's Walk leads through the grounds and along the banks of the River Cherwell for just under a mile.

Magdalen has a reputation as an artistic college and some of its most famous students and fellows have included Oscar Wilde, poet laureate Sir John Betjeman and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney.

The college also boasts a fine choir that sings *Hymnus Eucharisticus* at 6am on May Day (1 May) from the top of the 42m-bell tower. The event now marks the culmination of a solid night of drinking for most students as they gather in their glad rags on Magdalen Bridge to listen to the dawn chorus.

Opposite the college and sweeping along the banks of the River Cherwell are the

INFORMATION

Blackwell	1	C2
Mices	2	B2
Mices	3	C2
Police Station	4	B3
Post Office	5	B2
QI	6	B2
Tourist Office	7	B2
Virgin	8	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

All Souls College	9	C2
Ashmolean Museum	10	B2
Bodleian Library	11	C2
Bridge of Sighs	12	C2
Carfax Tower	13	B2
Christ Church Cathedral	14	C3
Christ Church College	15	C3
Church of St Mary the Virgin	16	C2
Howard C & Sons Punts	17	D2
Magdalen College	18	D2
Merton College	19	C2
Modern Art Oxford	20	B2
Museum of Oxford	21	B2
Museum of the History of Science	22	C2
New College	23	C2
Oxford Castle	24	B2
Radcliffe Camera	25	C2
Sheldonian Theatre	26	C2
University & Pitt Rivers Museums	27	C1

SLEEPING

Central Backpackers	28	A2
Malmaison	29	B2
Old Parsonage Hotel	30	B1
Orchard House	31	D3
Oxford Backpackers	32	A2
YHA Oxford	33	A2

EATING

Aziz	34	B3
Bangkok House	35	A2
Big Bang	36	B1
Branca	37	A1
Café Coco	38	D3
Covered Market	39	B2
Edamame	40	C2
Fishers	41	D3
G&D's	42	B1
G&D's	43	B3
Georgina's	44	B2
Jericho Café	45	A1
Mortons	(see 39)	
Mortons	46	B2
Mortons	47	B1
Mortons	48	B2
Noodle Bar	49	B2
Quod	50	C2

DRINKING

Eagle & Child	51	B1
Jericho Tavern	52	A1
Kazbar	53	D3
Living Room	54	B2
Raoul's	55	B1
Turf Tavern	56	C2
White Horse	57	C2

ENTERTAINMENT

Burton Taylor Theatre	58	B2
New Theatre	59	B2
Oxford Playhouse	60	B2
Po Na Na	61	B2

TRANSPORT

Gloucester Green Bus/Coach Station	62	B2
Salter Bros	63	C3
Taxi Rank	64	B2
Taxi Rank	65	B2
Taxi Rank	66	B2

beautiful and excellently labelled **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 286690; www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk; adult/under 16yr £2.60/free; 🕒 9am-6pm May-Aug, 9am-4.30pm Oct-Apr). The gardens are the oldest in Britain and were founded in 1621 for the study of medicinal plants.

Sheldonian Theatre

The monumental **Sheldonian Theatre** (☎ 277299; www.sheldon.ox.ac.uk; 15-16 Broad St; adult/under 16yr £2/1; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-3.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) was the first major work of Christopher Wren, at that time a University Professor of Astronomy. Inspired by the classical Theatre of Marcellus in Rome, it has a rectangular front end and a semicircular back, while inside, the ceiling of the main hall is blanketed by a fine 17th-century painting of the triumph of truth over ignorance. The Sheldonian is now used for college ceremonies and public concerts but you can climb to the cupola for good views of the surrounding buildings.

Bodleian Library & Radcliffe Camera

Oxford's **Bodleian Library** (☎ 277224; www.bodley.ox.ac.uk; cnr Broad St & Parks Rd) is one of the oldest public libraries in the world, and one of England's three copyright libraries. It holds more than seven million items on 118 miles of shelving and has seating space for up to 2500 readers.

The oldest part of the library surrounds the stunning Jacobean-Gothic **Old Schools Quadrangle**, which dates from the early 17th century. On the eastern side of the quad is the **Tower of Five Orders**, an ornate building depicting the five classical orders of architecture. On the west side is the **Divinity School** (admission £2; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4.30pm Sat), the university's first examination room. It is renowned as a masterpiece of 15th-century English Gothic architecture and has a superb fan-vaulted ceiling. A self-guided audio tour (£2.50) to these areas is available.

Most of the rest of the library is closed to visitors, but **library tours** (admission £6; 🕒 tours 10.30am, 11.30am, 2pm & 3pm Apr-Oct, 11am, 2pm & 3pm Nov-Mar) allow access to the medieval Duke Humfrey's library and 17th-century **Convocation House and Court**. The tour takes about an hour and is not suitable for children under 11 years of age.

Just south of the library is the **Radcliffe Camera** (Radcliffe Sq; no public access), the quintessential Oxford landmark and one of the city's most photographed buildings. The spectacular circular library was built between 1737 and 1749 in grand Palladian style, and boasts Britain's third-largest dome.

For excellent views of the Radcliffe Camera and surrounding buildings, climb the 14th-century tower in the beautiful **Church of St Mary**

ST SCHOLASTICA'S DAY MASSACRE

The first real wave of students arrived in Oxford in the 12th century, and right from the start an uneasy relationship grew between the townspeople and the bookish blow-ins. Name-calling and drunken brawls escalated into full-scale riots in 1209 and 1330 when browbeaten scholars abandoned Oxford to establish new universities in Cambridge and Stamford respectively. The riots of 10 and 11 February 1355 changed everything, however, and left a bitter scar on relations for hundreds of years.

Celebrations for St Scholastica's Day grew nasty when a drunken scuffle spilled into the street and years of simmering discontent and frustrations let loose. Soon students and townspeople took to each other's throats, with hundreds more rushing to join the brawl. By the end of the day the students had claimed victory and an uneasy truce was called.

The next morning, however, the furious townspeople returned with the help of local villagers armed with pickaxes, shovels and pikes. By sundown 63 students and 30 townspeople were dead. King Edward III sent troops to quell the rioting and eventually decided to bring the town under the control of the university.

To prove its authority, the university ordered the mayor and burgesses (citizens) to attend a service and pay a penny for every student killed on the anniversary of the riot each year. Incredibly, it took 600 years for the university to extend the olive branch and award a Doctorate of Civil Law to Mayor William Richard Gowers, MA, Oriel.

the Virgin (☎ 279111; www.university-church.ox.ac.uk; cnr High & Catte Sts; tower admission £2.50/1.50; ⏲ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun). On Sundays the tower does not open until after the morning services (about noon).

New College

From the Bodleian stroll under the **Bridge of Sighs**, a 1914 copy of the famous bridge in Venice, to **New College** (☎ 279 555; www.new.ox.ac.uk; cnr Holywell St & New College Lane; admission Easter-Sep £2, Oct-Easter free; ⏲ 11am-5pm Easter-Sep, 2-4pm Oct-Easter). This 14th-century college was the first in Oxford to accept undergraduates and is a fine example of the glorious perpendicular style. The chapel here is full of treasures including superb stained glass, much of it original, and Sir Jacob Epstein's disturbing statue of Lazarus.

Merton College

From High St follow the wonderfully named Logic Lane to **Merton College** (☎ 276310; www.merton.ox.ac.uk; Merton St; admission free; ⏲ 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), one of Oxford's original three colleges. Founded in 1264, Merton was the first to adopt collegiate planning, bringing scholars and tutors together into a formal community and providing a planned residence for them. The charming 14th-century **Mob Quad** here was the first of the college quads.

Just off the quad is a 13th-century **chapel** and the **Old Library** (admission by guided tour only; admission £2), the oldest medieval library in use. It is said that Professor JRR Tolkien spent many hours here while writing *The Lord of the Rings*. Other literary giants associated with the college include TS Eliot and Louis MacNeice.

If you're visiting in summer, look out for posters advertising candlelit concerts in the chapel.

All Souls College

One of the wealthiest of Oxford's colleges and unique in not accepting any undergraduate students, **All Souls** (☎ 279379; www.all-souls.ox.ac.uk; High St; admission free; ⏲ 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is primarily an academic research institution. It was founded in 1438 as a centre of prayer and learning, and today fellowship of the college is one of the highest academic honours in the country.

Much of the college façade dates from the 1440s and, unlike other older colleges, the front quad is largely unchanged in five centuries. It also contains a beautiful 17th-century sundial designed by Christopher Wren. Most obvious, though, are the twin mock-Gothic towers on the north quad. Designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1710, they were lambasted for ruining the Oxford skyline when erected.

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

A vast, rambling collection of art and antiquities is on display at the mammoth **Ashmolean** (☎ 278000; www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk; Beaumont St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), Britain's oldest public museum. Established in 1683, it is based on the extensive collection of the remarkably well-travelled John Tradescant, gardener to Charles I, and housed in one of Britain's best examples of neo-Grecian architecture.

Bursting with Egyptian, Islamic and Chinese art; rare porcelain, tapestries and silverware; priceless musical instruments; and extensive displays of European art (including works by Raphael and Michelangelo), it's impossible to take it all in at once. However, the Ashmolean is undergoing a substantial redevelopment phase, and as some galleries are closed a 'Treasures of the Ashmolean Museum' exhibition offers a cross section of highlights from the vast collection. The exhibition runs until December 2008. Otherwise, study the floor plan well and choose a manageable route through the sumptuous rooms and hallways.

UNIVERSITY & PITT RIVERS MUSEUMS

Housed in a glorious Victorian Gothic building with slender, cast-iron columns, ornate capitals and a soaring glass roof, the **University Museum** (☎ 272950; www.oum.ox.ac.uk; Parks Rd; admission free; ⏲ noon-5pm) is worth a visit for its architecture alone. However, the real draw is the mammoth natural history collection of more than five million exhibits ranging from exotic insects and fossils to a towering T-Rex skeleton.

Hidden away through a door at the back of the main exhibition hall, the **Pitt Rivers Museum** (☎ 270927; www.prm.ox.ac.uk; admission free; ⏲ noon-4.30pm) is a treasure-trove of weird and wonderful displays to satisfy every armchair adventurer's wildest dreams. In the half-light inside are glass cases and mysterious drawers stuffed with Victorian explorers' prized trophies. Feathered cloaks, necklaces of teeth, blowpipes, magic charms, Noh masks, totem poles, fur parkas, musical instruments and shrunken heads lurk here, making it a fascinating place for adults and children. The museum also runs an excellent series of children's workshops (usually the first Saturday of the month).

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Newly opened in 2006, **Oxford Castle Unlocked** (☎ 260666; www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk; 44-46 Oxford Castle; adult/under 15yr £6.95/5.25; ⏲ 10am-5pm) explores the 1000-year history of Oxford's castle and prison. You can explore the remains of the medieval motte and bailey, see an 11th-century crypt and hear tales of the inmates' grisly lives, daring escapes and cruel punishments.

Far removed from Oxford's musty hallways of history, **Modern Art Oxford** (☎ 722733; www.modernartoxford.org.uk; 30 Pembroke St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is one of the best contemporary art museums outside London. Nearby, the **Museum of Oxford** (☎ 252761; www.museumofoxford.org.uk; St Aldate's; adult/under 16yr £2/50p; ⏲ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) is dedicated to the history of the city and its university, while the **Museum of the History of Science** (☎ 277280; www.mhs.ox.ac.uk Broad St; admission free; ⏲ noon-4pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has a significant collection of historic scientific instruments and a blackboard used by Einstein.

For good views over the city you could climb Oxford's central landmark, **Carfax Tower** (☎ 792653; adult/under 15yr £1.90/95p; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Mar & Oct, 10am-3.30pm Nov-Feb), and for the best picnic ingredients, funky T-shirts and expensive brogues, don't miss the **covered market** (⏲ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), a haven of traditional butchers, fishmongers, cobblers and barbers.

Punting

Apart from visiting the colleges and museums, the quintessential Oxford experience includes an afternoon punting on the river, quaffing Pimms as you watch the dreaming spires float by.

Punts are available from mid-March to mid-October, 10am to dusk, and hold five people including the punter. They cost £10 per hour weekdays and £12 per hour on weekends.

The most central location to rent punts is at Magdalen Bridge, from **Howard C & Sons** (☎ 202643; High St; deposit £30). From here you can punt downstream around the Botanic Gardens and Christ Church Meadow or upstream around Magdalen Deer Park. Alternatively, head for the **Cherwell Boat House** (☎ 515978; www.cherwellboathouse.co.uk; Bardwell Rd; deposit £60) for a countryside amble where the destination of choice is the busy boozer the **Victoria Arms** (☎ 241382; Mill Lane). To get to the boathouse take bus 2 or 7 from Magdalen St to Bardwell Rd and follow the signposts.

Tours

Blackwell (☎ 333606; oxford@blackwell.co.uk; 48-51 Broad St; adult/child £7/6.50; ⏲ May-Oct) Runs 1½ -hour tours including a literary tour (2pm Tuesday, 11am Thursday), an 'Inklings' tour (11.45am Wednesday) and a historic Oxford tour (2pm Friday).

City Sightseeing (☎ 790522; www.citysightseeingoxford.com; adult/under 16yr £9.50/4.50; 🕑 every 10-15min 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct) Runs hop-on, hop-off bus tours from the bus or train stations or any of the 20 stops around town.

Oxford Information Centre (☎ 726871; www.visitoxford.org; 15-16 Broad St; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Runs 1½-hour tours of Oxford city and colleges (adult/under 16yr £6.50/3, 11am and 2pm Sunday to Friday, 10.30am, 11am, 1pm & 2pm Saturday); Inspector Morse tours (£7/3, 1.30pm Saturday); ghost tours (£5/3, 7.45pm Friday and Saturday June to October); family walking tours (£5/3, 1.30pm school holidays); and pub tours (adults only £6.50, 7pm Wednesday).

Salter Bros (☎ 243421; www.salterssteamers.co.uk; Folly Bridge; boat trips £8.60; 🕑 mid-May–mid-Sep) Offers boat trips along the Isis to Abingdon.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Oxford is often overpriced and underwhelming, and in the midrange bracket in particular, suffocating floral patterns are the norm. Between May and September beds fill up quickly in all price ranges, so book in advance or join the queue at the tourist office and pay for help.

If you're stuck, you'll find a selection of B&Bs along the Iffley, Abingdon, Banbury and Headington roads.

BUDGET

YHA Oxford (☎ 727275; oxford@yha.org.uk; 2A Botley Rd; dm/d £20.95/55; 🚭 💻 ♿) By far the best budget option in town, the YHA offers top-notch dorm accommodation, private rooms and loads of facilities including a restaurant, library, garden, laundry and a choice of lounges. All rooms have en suite and are bright and cheery, if a little functional – well worth considering over the city's cheapest B&Bs.

Central Backpackers (☎ 242288; www.centralbackpackers.co.uk; 13 Park End St; dm £14-18; 🚭 💻) Oxford's newest backpacker accommodation offers good-quality dorms right in the centre of town. The basic but bright and simple rooms sleep up to 12 people, the beds and duvets are new, there's a decent lounge with satellite TV, a rooftop terrace, and free internet and luggage storage.

Oxford Backpackers (☎ 721761; www.hostels.co.uk; 9 Hythe Bridge St; dm £14-18; 🚭 💻) Championing the laid-back, party-central attitude of student halls, this slightly scruffy place is brightly painted with cartoon-like murals and has a lounge full of picnic tables and battered sofas. It has a licensed bar, dorms sleeping up to 18 and tiny bathrooms for the number of beds.

MIDRANGE

Beaumont (☎ 241767; www.oxfordcity.co.uk/accom/beaumont; 234 Abingdon Rd; s £50-72, d £58-72; 🚭) Newly redecorated and sparkling clean, the Beaumont offers four excellent-value rooms with simple but elegant décor. With crisp white linen, pale and trendy flock wallpaper, mosaic bathrooms and beautiful furniture, it's all a class above most B&Bs of this price.

Cornerways (☎ 240135; jeakings@btopenworld.com; 282 Abingdon Rd; s/d £45/64; 🅿 🚭) A thoroughly modern interior awaits at this friendly guesthouse set in lovingly tended gardens. The rooms are big and bright with pale cream and deep red furnishings, all have en suite and there's a lovely bright conservatory and patio garden for breakfast.

Tilbury Lodge (☎ 862138; www.tilburylodge.com; 5 Tilbury Lane; s £50-60, £d £70-80; 🅿 🚭 💻) Although a little out of the centre, Tilbury Lodge is well worth the effort for its spacious top-of-the-line rooms with plush, contemporary décor and excellent bathrooms. Giant pillows in funky fabrics adorn the big beds, light streams through the large windows, and downstairs there's a conservatory for guest use.

Orchard House (☎ 249200; www.theorchardhouseoxford.co.uk; 225 Iffley Rd; s £60-85, d £80-90; 🅿 🚭) This lovely arts-and-crafts-style house is set in beautiful secluded gardens and makes a wonderful retreat from the city. The sleek and stylish extra-large bedrooms each have their own sofa and breakfast table, elegant but luxurious modern décor and limestone bathrooms.

Burlington House (☎ 513513; www.burlington-house.co.uk; 374 Banbury Rd; s £45-60, d £85-90; 🅿 🚭) Everything in this Victorian merchant house is immaculately kept and elegantly decorated, and although a long way from the centre, it's well worth the trip. The big, bright rooms are loaded with period character but decked out in contemporary style with pale neutral colours, silky bedspreads and plenty of cushions.

TOP END

our pick **Malmaison** (☎ 268400; www.malmaison-oxford.com; 3 Oxford Castle; d £140-150, ste £195-350; 🚭 💻 ♿) Oxford's newest hotel is spectacularly set in a former Victorian prison with sleek and slinky rooms created out of the vaulted cells. The wow factor is matched by the plush interiors, sultry lighting, dark woods and giant beds. If you're planning a real bender, go for the Governor's Suite, complete with four-poster bed and mini cinema.

Old Parsonage Hotel (☎ 310210; www.oldparsonage-hotel.co.uk; 1 Banbury Rd; r £155-195; 🅿 🚭 💻) Dripping with character and skilfully blending just the right mix of period charm and modern luxury, this 17th-century boutique hotel is a wonderfully quirky place to stay. An eclectic art collection, a buzzing bar-restaurant and oddly mismatched furniture make the public areas, while the chic bedrooms have handmade beds, marble bathrooms and flat-screen TVs.

Eating

There's plenty of choice for food in Oxford, but a glut of predictable chain restaurants in the centre of town. The new castle complex has a lovely pedestrianised square for alfresco dining but few original options. Head to Jericho or Cowley for a more quirky selection.

BUDGET

Georgina's (☎ 249527; Ave 3, Covered Market; mains £5-8; 🕑 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Hidden up a scruffy staircase in the covered market and plastered with old cinema posters, this funky little café serves up a bumper crop of bulging salads, hearty soups, doorsteps of bread and such goodies as goats cheese quesadillas and scrumptious cakes.

our pick **Edamame** (☎ 246916; 15 Holywell St; mains £6-8; 🕑 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) Small, simple and intimate, this tiny Japanese restaurant places a firm emphasis on the food rather than the fanfare and dishes up the best noodles, rice dishes and sushi (Thursday night only) in town. Don't let the queue put you off – it's well worth the wait.

Jericho Café (☎ 310840; 112 Walton St; mains £5-7; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Relaxed meals over the newspaper, long coffees with a crossword, and a choice of delectable meals with vaguely healthy ingredients make the quirky Jericho a favourite hang-out. Go for Moroccan lamb, fish pie, falafel, or wholesome salads; choose from the range of vegetarian dishes; or simply give in to those luscious cakes.

Aziz (☎ 794945; 228 Cowley Rd & Folly Bridge; mains £7-8; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Feted as Oxford's best curry house, this award-winning Indian and Bangladeshi restaurant attracts vegans, vegetarians and curry lovers in hordes. There's an extensive menu, chilled surroundings and portions generous enough to ensure you'll be rolling out the door.

For a quick bite en route between colleges, look out for the ever-popular **Mortons** (☎ 200867; baguettes £2.30-2.80) Covered Market (103 Covered Market); Broad St (22 Broad St); Little Clarendon St (36 Little Clarendon St); New Inn Hall St (22 New Inn Hall St) for its fine selection of innovatively filled baguettes.

For more hearty fare try the **Noodle Bar** (☎ 201400; 100 Gloucester Green; mains £5-5.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) for bowls of steaming noodles and generous rice dishes, or **Red Star** (☎ 251248; 187 Cowley Rd; mains £5.50-7; 🕑 lunch & dinner) for pan-Asian dishes and giant bento boxes.

At all other times head for funky **G&D's** (☎ 516652; 🕑 8am-midnight) Little Clarendon St (55 Little Clarendon St); St Aldate's (94 St Aldate's), for the best ice cream, brownies and desserts in town. You'll also get copies of the *Beano and Dandy* and regular silly hat, cow-dunking and most-authentic-mooing competitions.

MIDRANGE

Café Coco (☎ 200232; 23 Cowley Rd; mains £7-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Chilled out, clued-in and serving a superb selection of Mediterranean food, Café Coco is a Cowley Rd institution, as popular for Sunday brunch as late-night cocktails. It's a sort of hip, bohemian hang-out, with classic posters on the walls and a bald clown in an ice-bath.

our pick **Bangkok House** (☎ 200705; 42A Hythe Bridge St; mains £5.50-9.25; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The food's delicious, the service impeccable, the prices affordable, and unsurprisingly, this little slice of Thailand is always packed. Elaborately carved tables, massive chairs and ornate wall hangings set the scene for the wonderfully aromatic Thai curries, sizzling meat dishes and delicately prepared dumplings.

Big Bang (☎ 511441; 124 Walton St; mains £8-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) It's small, not much to look at and has a very simple menu, but deciding between the tasty sausages, choosing a speciality mash and selecting just the right gravy can be very difficult indeed. Come on a Wednesday and you'll even get live jazz thrown in.

Branca (☎ 556111; 111 Walton St; mains £9-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Floor-to-ceiling glass, dark woods, moody lighting and exposed pipework set the scene at this slick Italian restaurant in Jericho. The food is rustic, though, with stone-baked pizzas, simple pastas and hearty meats pulling in the crowds every night of the week.

Fishers (☎ 243003; St Clements; mains £9-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Nautically themed and generally buzzing, Oxford's finest seafood restaurant serves up simple but heavenly plates of everything from traditional haddock and chips to Shetland mussels, yellow fin tuna and New England lobster.

TOP END

Quod (☎ 202505; 92 High St; mains £9-17; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Bright, buzzing and decked out with modern art and beautiful people, this designer joint dishes up Mediterranean brasserie-style food to the masses. It doesn't take reservations, is always heaving and at worst will tempt you to chill by the bar with a cocktail while you wait for a table.

Lemon Tree (☎ 311936; 268 Woodstock Rd; mains £9-19; 🕑 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner Mon & Tue) Slightly out of town but worth the trip, this smart but unpretentious restaurant is set in a north Oxford villa. The food is loosely Mediterranean and ranges from such delicacies as spiced butternut squash and chickpea tagine to pork belly with honey-glazed parsnips and curly kale.

Drinking

Oxford has plenty of choice when it comes to drinking venues, so there's no excuse for ending up in the chain pubs and bars in the centre of town.

PUBS

Turf Tavern (☎ 243235; 4 Bath Pl; 🕑 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) Hidden away down narrow alleyways, this tiny medieval pub is one of the best loved in town. Packed with a mix of students, professionals and the lucky tourists who manage to find it, its low-ceilinged bar and outdoor courtyards host regular poker nights, pub quizzes and acoustic sets.

Eagle & Child (☎ 302925; 49 St Giles'; 🕑 noon-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) Affectionately known as the 'Bird & Baby', this atmospheric place has been a pub since 1650 and is still a hotchpotch of nooks and crannies. It was once the favourite haunt of JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis and their literary friends and still attracts a mellow crowd.

White Horse (☎ 728318; 52 Broad St; 🕑 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) More a large cupboard than an actual pub, this tiny olde-worlde place was a favourite retreat for TV detective Inspector Morse. It gets pretty crowded in the evening, but is good for a quiet afternoon pint and intellectual conversation.

BARS

Raoul's (☎ 553732; 32 Walton St) Packed to the gills on weekends and serving some of the best cocktails in town, this trendy retro-look bar is one of Jericho's finest. Guest DJs play chilled funky jazz as effortlessly cool punters try hard not to look impressed by the pestle-wielding bar staff.

Kazbar (☎ 202920; 25-27 Cowley Rd; 🕑 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) This funky Moroccan-themed bar has giant windows, low lighting, warm colours and a cool vibe. It's buzzing most nights with hip young things sipping cocktails and filling up on the Spanish and North African tapas (£3 to £5).

Jericho Tavern (☎ 311775; 56 Walton St; 🕑 noon-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Chilled out and super cool with big leather sofas, tasselled standard lamps and boldly patterned wallpaper, this hip bar also has a live-music venue upstairs. Adorned with giant portraits of John Peel, Supergrass and Radiohead, it's supposedly where the Abingdon boys played their first gig.

Living Room (☎ 260210; Oxford Castle; 🕑 10am-midnight Sun-Wed, 10am-1am Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat) The best of the new set of chain pubs that have blown in to the castle development, this one is all neutral tones, deep leather sofas, low lighting and lads on the pull. There's live blues on the baby grand from Tuesday to Saturday nights, a lengthy cocktail menu and the best outdoor seating in Oxford.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Despite a large student population, Oxford's club scene is fairly limited, with several cattle-mart clubs in the centre of town and a lot of middle-of-the-road music. Try the suggestions here for something a little more adventurous.

Zodiac (☎ 420042; 190 Cowley Rd; club admission up to £6; 🕑 7pm-2am Mon-Thu, 7pm-3am Fri & Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Oxford's best live-music venue is a wonderfully grubby place that attracts an eclectic crowd with its proudly indie vibe and unpretentious attitude. Live gigs upstairs feature anything from singer-songwriters to guitar-thrashing rockers, while the club downstairs plays anything from funk, soul and disco to reggae, glam rock and punk.

Po Na Na (☎ 249171; 13-15 Magdalen St; admission up to £6; 🕑 10pm-2am Tue-Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Still one of the best bets in town for a night out, Po Na Na is a small cave-like place with plenty of Moroccan lanterns, drapes and candles, a hip crowd and, in between the regular club nights, some big-name DJs and live events. Expect funk, indie, Old Skool, house and reggae.

THEATRE

The city's main stage for quality drama is the **Oxford Playhouse** (☎ 305305; www.oxfordplayhouse.com; Beaumont St). Just around the corner, the **Burton Taylor Theatre** (☎ 798600; Gloucester St) hosts quirky student shows, while the **Pegasus Theatre** (☎ 722851; www.pegasustheatre.org.uk; Magdalen Rd) features alternative independent productions. Blockbuster productions and ageing pop stars strut their stuff at the **New Theatre** (☎ 0870 606 3500; www.getlive.co.uk/oxford; George St).

Creation Theatre (☎ 761393; www.creationtheatre.co.uk) produces highly original, mostly Shakespearean, shows in a variety of non-traditional venues, including city parks, the BMW plant and Oxford Castle.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

With a host of spectacular buildings with great acoustics, and two orchestras, Oxford is an excellent place to attend a classical concert. You'll find the widest range of events at www.musicatoxford.com or www.oxfordtickets.com. Alternatively, watch out for posters around town or contact one of these groups:

City of Oxford Orchestra (☎ 744457; www.cityofoxfordorchestra.co.uk)

Oxford Contemporary Music (☎ 488369; www.ocmevents.org)

Oxford Philomusica (☎ 0870 606 0804; www.oxfordphil.com)

Getting There & Away

BUS

Competition on the Oxford–London route is fierce, with three companies offering cheap and cheaper services at all hours of the day and night.

Megabus (www.megabus.com) Coaches run every half-hour to/from Buckingham Palace Rd (one way from £1, 1¾ hours).

Oxford Espress (☎ 785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) Runs up to every 15 minutes to/from Victoria coach station (return £13, 1½ hours).

Oxford Tube (☎ 772250; www.oxfordtube.com) Runs every 10 minutes to/from Buckingham Palace Rd (return £13, 1½ hours).

The Heathrow Express (£19, 70 minutes) runs half-hourly 4am to 10pm, hourly midnight to 4am, while the Gatwick Express (£27, two hours) runs hourly 5.15am to 8.15pm and every two hours 10pm to 4am.

National Express has five direct buses to Birmingham (£10.20, two hours), and one service to Bath (£8.90, two hours) and Bristol (£12, 2¾ hours).

Stagecoach serves most of the small towns in Oxfordshire and runs the X5 service to Cambridge (£7, 3½ hours) roughly every half-hour. If you're planning a lot of bus journeys it's worth buying a Goldrider pass (£18), which allows unlimited bus travel in Oxfordshire for seven days.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Thanks to a complicated one-way system and a shortage of parking spaces, driving and parking in Oxford are a nightmare. Drivers are strongly advised to use the five Park & Ride car parks on major routes leading into town. Three car parks are free to use, the others cost 60p. The return bus journey to town (10 to 15 minutes, every 10 minutes) costs £2.

TRAIN

There are half-hourly services to London Paddington (£18.80, one hour); and roughly hourly trains to Birmingham (£20, 1¼ hours), Worcester (£16.40, 1½ hours) and Hereford (£14.70, two hours). Hourly services also run to Bath (£17.20, 1¼ hours) and Bristol (£18.70, 1½ hours) but require a change at Didcot Parkway.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

The *Cycle into Oxford* map, available from the tourist office, shows all local cycle routes. You can hire bikes from **Cyclo Analysts** (☎ 424444; 150 Cowley Rd; per day/week £10/27).

BUS

If sightseeing has worn you out buses 1 and 5 go to Cowley Rd from Carfax, 2 and 7 go along Banbury Rd from Magdalen St, and 16 and 35 run along Abingdon Rd from St Aldate's.

A multi-operator Plus Pass (per day/week/month £5/16/44) allows unlimited travel on Oxford's bus system.

TAXI

There are taxi ranks at the train station and bus station, as well as on St Giles and at Carfax. Be prepared to join a long queue after closing time at the pub.

WOODSTOCK

☎ 01993 / pop 2389

Conveniently close to Oxford yet a quintessential rural retreat, the charming village of Woodstock makes a wonderful day trip from the city. The big draw here is Blenheim Palace, the opulent country pile of the Churchill family, but the village itself is full of picturesque creeper-clad cottages and elegant town houses.

The **Oxfordshire Museum** (☎ 811456; Park St; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has displays on local history, art, archaeology and wildlife. It also houses the **tourist office** (☎ 813276).

Blenheim Palace

One of England's greatest stately homes, **Blenheim Palace** (☎ 08700 602080; www.blenheimpalace.com; adult/under 16yr £14/8.50, park & garden only £9/4.50; 🕐 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Feb–Oct, Wed-Sun Nov–mid-Dec, park open year-round) is a monumental Baroque fantasy designed by Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor between 1705 and 1722. The land and funds to build the house were granted to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, by a grateful Queen Anne after his decisive victory at the Battle of Blenheim. Now a Unesco World Heritage Site, Blenheim (pronounced *blen*-num) is home to the 11th duke and duchess.

Inside, the house is stuffed with statues, tapestries, ostentatious furniture and giant oil paintings in elaborate gilt frames. You enter through the **Great Hall**, a vast space topped by 20m-high ceilings adorned with images of the first duke in battle. From here you proceed to the opulent **Saloon**, the grandest and most important public room, and on to the three **State Rooms** with their plush décor and priceless **China Cabinets**. Further on, the magnificent 55m **Long Library** was originally intended as a picture gallery but now houses a significant collection of books, a Willis organ and marble sculptures of Marlborough and Queen Anne.

From the library you can access the **Churchill Exhibition**, which is dedicated to the life, work and writings of Sir Winston, who was born at Blenheim in 1874 (see the boxed text, p55). Churchill and his wife, Lady Clementine Spencer-Churchill, are buried in nearby Bladon Church.

If the crowds in the house become too oppressive, retire to the lavish gardens and vast parklands, parts of which were landscaped by Capability Brown. To the front, an artificial lake sports a beautiful bridge by Vanbrugh, while a mini train is needed to take visitors to a maze, adventure playground and butterfly house. For a quieter and longer stroll, glorious walks lead to an arboretum, cascade and temple.

Sleeping & Eating

Woodstock has a good choice of accommodation, but it's not cheap. Plan a day trip from Oxford if you're travelling on a budget.

Townhouse B&B (☎ 810843; info@woodstock-townhouse.com; 15 High St; s £45-65, d £70-100; ☒) This lovely 18th-century stone town house offers a selection of en suite rooms right in the centre of town. There's plenty of period character but no lack of modern style, and facilities include TVs with DVD player.

Kings Arms Hotel (☎ 813636; www.kings-hotel-woodstock.co.uk; 19 Market St; s/d £70/130; ☒ 💻) Set in a lovely Georgian town house, the rooms here are sleek and stylish yet manage to retain much of their period charm. Downstairs there's a bright bistro serving modern British fare (mains £9 to £14) and a good bar with leather sofas and cheaper snacks.

Brotherton's Brasserie (☎ 811114; 1 High St; mains £8-15; 🕐 lunch & dinner, closed Tue) Set in an atmospheric 17th-century stone house and lit with the warm glow of gaslight, this popular brasserie is one of the best spots in town. The rustic interior provides an informal ambience for the competent menu, which features everything from pasta to wild boar casserole.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus 20 runs every half-hour (hourly on Sunday) from Oxford bus station (20 minutes). **Cotswold Roaming** (☎ 308300; www.cotswold-roaming.co.uk) offers half-day tours (adult/under 15 years £18/11) to Blenheim from Oxford. The cost includes admission to the palace.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

☎ 01491 / pop 10,513

Set on the banks of the river and studded with elegant stone houses, a few Tudor relics, chichi shops and affluent residents, Henley is a conservative but well-heeled kind of place that bursts into action for its world-famous regatta and festival each year. Outside the summer festivities it's a pleasant but workaday commuter town with an interesting museum, a scenic setting and a good choice of facilities.

The **tourist office** (☎ 578034; www.visithenley-on-thames.com; The Barn, King's Rd; 🕐 11am-4.45pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 11am-3.45pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) is next to the handsome town hall.

River & Towing Museum

Life in Henley has always focused on the river, and the impressive **River & Rowing Museum** (☎ 415600; www.rrm.co.uk; Mill Meadows; adult/under 18yr £7/5; 🕐 10am-5.30pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Apr; ♿) takes a look at the town's relationship with the Thames, the history of rowing, and the wildlife and commerce the river supports. Hands-on activities and interactive displays make it a good spot for children, and the *Wind in the Willows* exhibition brings Kenneth Grahame's stories of Ratty, Mole, Badger and Toad to life.

Festivals & Events

HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA

The first ever Oxford and Cambridge boat race was held in Henley in 1839 and ever since the cream of English society has descended on this small town each year for a celebration of boating, back-slapping and the beau monde. The five-day **Henley Royal Regatta** (☎ 572153; www.hrr.co.uk) has grown into a major fixture in the social calendar of the upwardly mobile, and is a massive corporate entertainment opportunity.

The regatta is held in the first week of July; tickets for the public enclosure cost £10 to £16.

HENLEY FESTIVAL

In the week following the regatta the town continues its celebrations with the **Henley Festival** (☎ 843404; www.henley-festival.co.uk), a vibrant black-tie affair that features everything from big-name international stars to quirky, alternative acts. Expect anything from opera to rock, jazz, comedy and swing. The main events take place on a floating stage on the Thames and tickets vary in price from £83 for a seat in the grandstand to £25 for a space on the promenade.

Sleeping & Eating

Henley has a good choice of accommodation, especially at the top end, but if you're planning to visit during either festival book well in advance.

Apple Ash (☎ 574198; www.appleash.com; Woodlands Rd, Harpsden Woods; s/d £50/70; 🅿 ☒) Lovingly maintained and beautifully decorated, it's well worth the 2-mile trip from town to stay at this charming Edwardian country house. The spacious rooms retain their period character but also offer modern comfort and style, with pale fabrics and restrained floral touches.

our pick **Hotel du Vin** (☎ 848400; www.hotelduvin.com; New St; d £115-395; 🅿 ☒ 💻) Set in the former Brakspears Brewery, this upmarket hotel chain scores highly for its blend of industrial chic and top-of-the-line designer sophistication. The spacious rooms and opulent suites are slick and stylish and are matched by a walk-in humidor, incredible billiards rooms, huge wine cellar and a popular bistro (mains £14.50).

Green Olive (☎ 412220; 28 Market Pl; meze £3.95-6.50; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Bright, airy and usually buzzing, the Green Olive serves up a menu of more than 40 traditional Greek meze. Portions are generous, so choose carefully for a light lunch or go the whole hog and opt for all your favourites for dinner. There's a lovely garden area at the back for alfresco summer dining.

Henley Bar & Grill (☎ 576126; Bell St; mains £8-11; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This contemporary-styled brasserie with high-backed leather chairs, open fire, grand piano and airy conservatory features solid fare such as char-grilled tuna and Barbary duck, and a killer Guinness ice cream.

our pick **Crooked Billet** (☎ 681048; www.thecrookedbillet.co.uk; Stoke Row; mains £12-20; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Hidden down a back lane and surrounded by trees, the Crooked Billet is a 17th-century inn famous as the one-time hideout of highwayman Dick Turpin. Today it is little changed – beer is drawn directly from casks in the cellar and the low beams, flagstone floor and inglenook fireplace are all originals. However, it's the food that really draws the crowds, with local produce being whipped into modern, mouthwatering fare such as chicken baked with goats cheese, warm chorizo salad and puy lentils, or venison with haggis and roast figs in a port and juniper sauce.

Getting There & Around

Bus X39 links Henley and Oxford (50 minutes, every two hours). Trains to London Paddington take about one hour (£11.40, hourly).

If you fancy seeing the local area from the river, **Hobbs & Son** (☎ 572035; www.hobbs-of-henley.com) runs hour-long afternoon river trips from April to September (adult/under 16 years £5.50/4.50) and hires five-seater rowing boats (£12 per hour) and four-seater motorboats (£20 per hour).

UFFINGTON WHITE HORSE

One of England's most remarkable and mysterious ancient sites lies about 20 miles southwest of Oxford near the handsome market town of Wantage. The Uffington White Horse is a stylised chalk horse cut into the hillside almost 3000 years ago. No-one is sure why the people of the time went to so much trouble to create the image or what exactly it is supposed to represent.

Regardless, it is an extraordinary figure, measuring 114m long and 49m wide, and is thought to be the oldest chalk figure in Britain. It is best seen from a distance, or from the air, because of the stylised lines of perspective.

Just below the figure is **Dragon Hill** – so called because it is believed that St George slew the dragon here – and above it the grass-covered earthworks of **Uffington Castle**. From the youth hostel, near Wantage, a wonderful 5-mile walk leads along the Ridgeway to the White Horse.

The **Vale & Downland Museum** (☎ 01235-771447; www.wantage.com/museum; Church St; adult/under 25yr in full-time education £2.50/1; ⏲ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) in Wantage tells the history of the area and chalk figure in more detail.

THE COTSWOLDS

Undeniably beautiful, quintessentially English and beloved by tourists and locals alike, the lush rolling hills and picture-postcard villages of the Cotswolds are one of the country's most popular spots. With glorious honey-coloured villages riddled with beautiful old mansions, thatched cottages, atmospheric churches and rickety almshouses, the region just oozes old-world English charm.

A boom in the medieval wool trade brought the area its wealth and left it with such a glut of beautiful buildings that its place in history is secured for evermore. If you've ever craved exposed beams, dreamed of falling asleep under English rose wallpaper or lusted after a cream tea in midafternoon, there's no finer place to fulfil your fantasies. Just be aware that you won't be alone – the Cotswolds can be besieged by tourists and traffic during the summer months.

Orientation & Information

The limestone hills of the Cotswolds extend across a narrow band of land east of the M5, stretching almost as far as Oxford at their widest point, north to Chipping Campden and south almost as far as Bath. Most of the region lies within Gloucestershire, but parts leak out into Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The Cotswolds are protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

If you'd like to rent your own Cotswold cottage, try the websites listed here for properties throughout the region:

Campden Cottages (www.campdencottages.co.uk)
Cotswold Cottages (www.cotswolds.info/cottages.shtml)
Cotswold Cottage Company (www.cotswoldcottage.co.uk)
Discover the Cotswolds (www.discoverthecotswolds.net)
Manor Cottages & Cotswold Retreats (www.manorcottages.co.uk)

For online information on attractions, accommodation and events:

Cotswolds (www.the-cotswolds.org)
Cotswolds Tourism (www.cotswolds.com)
Oxfordshire Cotswolds (www.oxfordshirecotswolds.org)

Activities

The gentle hills of the Cotswolds are perfect for walking, cycling and riding.

The long-distance **Cotswold Way** (102 miles) gives walkers a wonderful overview of the area. The route meanders from Chipping Campden to Bath, with no major climbs or difficult stretches, and is easily accessible from many points en route if you fancy tackling a shorter section. Ask at local tourist offices for details of day hikes or pick up a copy of one of the many walking guides to the region.

Away from the main roads, the winding lanes of the Cotswolds make fantastic cycling territory, with little traffic, glorious views and gentle gradients. Again, the local tourist offices are invaluable in helping to plot a route.

Getting Around

Public transport through the Cotswolds is fairly limited, with bus services running to and from major hubs only, and train services just skimming the northern and southern borders. However, with a little careful planning and patience you can see all the highlights of the area. Tourist offices stock several useful *Explore the Cotswolds* brochures with bus and rail summaries for the area.

For the most flexibility and the option of getting off the beaten track, having your own car is unbeatable. Car hire can be arranged in most major centres (see p970).

MINSTER LOVELL

☎ 01993

The gorgeous village of Minster Lovell was one of William Morris' favourite spots, and the cluster of stone cottages nestled beside an ancient pub and riverside mill are little changed today. Set on a gentle slope leading down to the meandering River Windrush, Minster Lovell is a glorious place for an afternoon pit stop, quiet overnight retreat or start to a valley walk.

The main sight here is the ruins of **Minster Lovell Hall**, the 15th-century manor house home to Viscount Francis Lovell. Lovell fought with Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 but later mysteriously disappeared. When a skeleton was discovered inside a secret vault in the house in 1708, it was assumed he had died while in hiding.

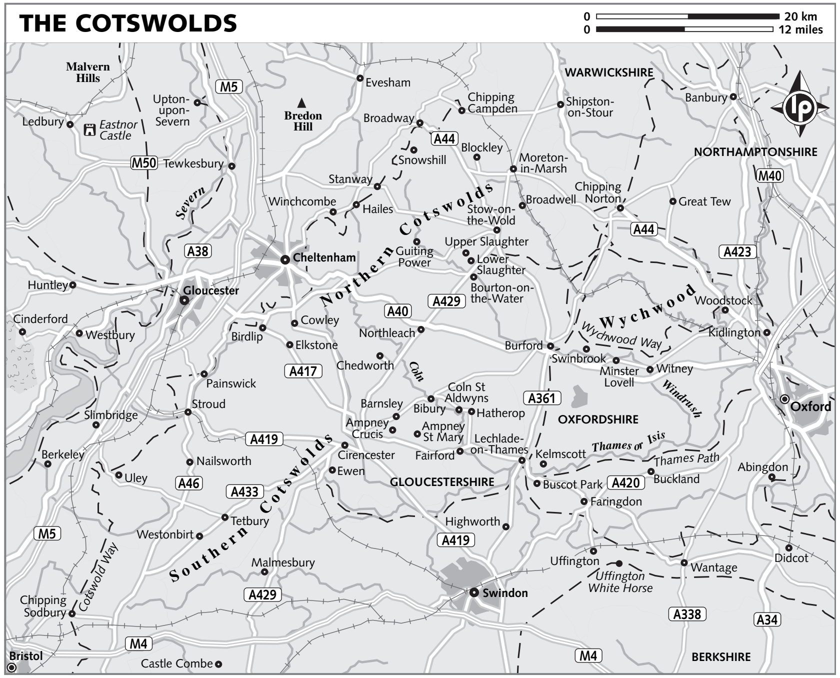
If you'd like to stay overnight, the **Mill & Old Swan** (☎ 774441; www.millandoldswan-isc.co.uk; s £50-100, d £60-140; 🅿 💻) offers charming period-style rooms in the 15th-century Old Swan or more modern Scandinavian design in the converted mill. The Old Swan serves decent pub food (£8 to £10) at night.

Swanbrook (www.swanbrook.co.uk) runs three buses Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday) between Cheltenham (£6.50, one hour) and Oxford (30 minutes) via Minster Lovell. Stagecoach buses 233 and X3 between Witney and Burford stop here 10 times a day, Monday to Saturday (10 minutes each way).

BURFORD

☎ 01993 / pop 1877

Little changed since its glory days at the height of the wool trade, Burford is a stunningly picturesque place slithering down a steep hill to a medieval crossing point on the River Windrush. The main street and the quiet lanes off it are lined with higgledy-piggledy stone


THE COTSWOLDS
0
20 km
0
12 miles
Malvern Hills
Ledbury
Eastnor Castle
Upton-upon-Severn
M5
Bredon Hill
Evesham
Broadway
A44
Chipping Campden
Shipston-on-Stour
WARWICKSHIRE
Banbury
Snowshill
Blockley
Moreton-in-Marsh
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
M40
M50
Tewkesbury
Stanway
Winchcombe
Hailes
Severn
Northern Cotswolds
Stow-on-the-Wold
Broadwell
Chipping Norton
Great Tew
A44
A38
Cheltenham
Guiting Power
Upper Slaughter
Lower Slaughter
Bourton-on-the-Water
A423
Huntley
Gloucester
A40
A429
Wychwood
Woodstock
Cinderford
Westbury
Birdlip
Cowley
Northleach
Wychwood Way
Kidlington
Elkstone
Burford
Swinbrook
Minster Lovell
Witney
A417
Chedworth
Coln
Painswick
Windrush
Stroud
Coln St Aldwyns
Barnsley
Bibury
Hatherop
A361
Oxford
Slimbridge
Ampney Crucis
Ampney St Mary
OXFORDSHIRE
A419
Lechlade-on-Thames
Thames or Isis
Berkeley
Nailsworth
Cirencester
Fairford
Kelmscott
Thames Path
Ewen
Abingdon
Uley
A46
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Buscot Park
A420
Buckland
A433
Faringdon
Tetbury
Highworth
M5
Westonbirt
A419
Southern Cotswolds
Malmesbury
Uffington
Wantage
Didcot
Cotswold Way
Uffington White Horse
A429
Swindon
Chipping Sodbury
A338
A34
M4
Bristol
Castle Combe
M4
BERKSHIRE

cottages, fine Cotswold town houses and the odd Elizabethan or Georgian gem. This incredible array of buildings attracts hordes of visitors, though, and the town can be frustratingly busy in midsummer. Add on a glut of specialist boutiques, tearooms and antique shops peddling flowery china and nostalgia and it can all feel a bit overwhelming.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 823558; Sheep St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) has several leaflets describing walks in the local area.

Sights & Activities

Burford's main attraction lies in its remarkable buildings, including the 16th-century **Tolsey House** (Toll House; High St; admission free; 🕒 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), where the wealthy wool merchants held their meetings. This quaint building perches on sturdy pillars and now houses a small museum on Burford's history.

Off High St you'll find the town's 14th-century **almshouses** and the gorgeous **Church of St John the Baptist**. The Norman tower here is topped by a 15th-century steeple and inside you'll find a fine fan-vaulted ceiling and medieval screens dividing the chapels.

Younger visitors will enjoy a visit to the excellent **Cotswold Wildlife Park** (☎ 823006; www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk; adult/under 16yr £9/6.50; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Mar-Sep, 10am-3.30pm Oct-Feb), set around a Victorian manor house. The park is home to everything from penguins to white rhinos and giant cats.

If you have the time and fancy getting away from the crowds, it's worth the effort to walk east along the picturesque river path to the untouched and rarely visited village of **Swinbrook** (3 miles), where the beautiful church has some remarkable tombs.

Sleeping & Eating

Burford has a wonderful choice of atmospheric, upmarket hotels but far fewer options at more affordable prices.

Priory (☎ 823249; 35 High St; s £22.50-47.50, d £47.50-60) Housing the only budget beds in town, the standard rooms here are small and functional, while the en suite 'superior' rooms are newer and better but far from spacious. The restaurant serves fairly predictable but decent fare (mains £6 to £8).

Westview House (☎ 824723; www.westview-house.co.uk; 151 The Hill; s/d £45/70; ⊠) This lovely old stone cottage has two bright and spacious guest rooms with plenty of period character. The Heritage Room has exposed beams, stone walls and a cast-iron bed, while the Windrush Room has its own private balcony overlooking the garden.

our pick **Lamb Inn** (☎ 823155; www.lambinn-burford.co.uk; Sheep St; r £145-165; 🅿) Step back in time with a stay at the Lamb, a 15th-century inn just dripping with character. Expect flagstone floors, low, beamed ceilings, creaking stairs and a charming, laid-back atmosphere downstairs, and luxurious period-style rooms with antique furniture and cosy comfort upstairs.

Jonathan's at the Angel (☎ 822714; www.theangelatburford.co.uk; 14 Witney St; mains £11-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Set in a lovely 16th-century coaching inn, this atmospheric brasserie serves up a good range of modern British and European food. Equally good but less formal dining (£7.95) is available at the bar.

Getting There & Away

From Oxford, Swanbrook runs three buses a day (one on Sunday) to Burford (45 minutes). Stagecoach buses 233 and X3 run between Witney and Burford 10 times a day, Monday to Saturday (20 minutes).

CHIPPING NORTON

☎ 01608 / pop 5688

Largely undiscovered by the tourist hordes, Chipping Norton – or 'Chippy' as it is locally known – is a sleepy but attractive place with a workaday attitude and some lovely buildings. The market square is surrounded by handsome Georgian buildings, stone cottages and old coaching inns and on Church St you'll find a row of beautiful honey-coloured **almshouses** built in the 17th century. Further on is the secluded **Church of St Mary**, a classic example of the Cotswold wool churches, with a magnificent 15th-century perpendicular nave and clerestory. Chippy's most enduring landmark, however, is the arresting **Bliss Tweed Mill** (now converted to apartments) on the outskirts of town. A monument to the industrial architecture of the 19th century, the building is more like a stately home than a factory.

For overnight accommodation, **Norten's B&B** (☎ 645060; www.nortens.co.uk; 10 New St; s £45, d £55-65; ⊠) offers a range of really lovely contemporary rooms with simple, minimalist design. The downstairs café does a good range of bistro-style food (mains £4 to £7).

Another good bet is **Off the Beaten Track** (☎ 646383; www.offthebeatentrack.uk.com; 18 Horsefair; s/d £45/70), a brasserie and bar with a selection of comfortable, modern guest rooms. The restaurant (mains £8 to £15) serves a modern British menu and is probably the top spot in town for food.

Stagecoach bus 20 runs between Chippy and Oxford roughly every half-hour.

WORTH THE TRIP

One of the hidden gems of the Cotswolds, the gorgeous village of Great Tew is little changed since medieval times, with the 16th-century **Falkland Arms** (☎ 683653; www.falklandarms.org.uk; Great Tew; r £85-110) sitting right on the village green. Roaring fires, flagstone floors and low beams are only part of its charm – the real joy comes in the local ales, ciders and wines, the traditional clay pipes and snuff still on sale, and the refreshing walk down the road when you need to use the loo. The food (mains £5 to £9) ranges from homemade soups and crusty baguettes to traditional Sunday roasts with all the trimmings, while upstairs the six guest rooms offer four-poster or cast-iron beds and period style. It doesn't get much more genuine than this.

Great Tew is about 4 miles east of Chipping Norton.

MORETON-IN-MARSH

☎ 01608 / pop 3198

Unassuming Moreton was once a lovely town but is now a major road axis and is rather spoiled by its incessant traffic. However, it's a useful transport hub and still has a clutch of beautiful buildings. On Tuesdays the town bursts into life for its weekly market.

Pulhams Coaches (☎ 01451-820369; www.pulhamscoaches.com) runs eight services daily between Moreton and Cheltenham (one hour, Monday to Saturday). Two Sunday services run from May to September only. All buses go via Stow-on-the-Wold (15 minutes) and Bourton-on-the-Water (20 minutes).

There are trains roughly every hour to Moreton from London Paddington (£27.50, 1½ hours) via Oxford (£9.30, 35 minutes) and on to Worcester (£10.10, 45 minutes) and Hereford (£14.20, 1½ hours).

CHIPPING CAMPDEN

☎ 01386 / pop 1943

The graceful curving main street of Chipping Campden is flanked by a wonderful array of wayward stone cottages, fine terraced houses, ancient inns and historic homes, making it a truly unspoiled gem in an area full of achingly pretty villages. Despite its obvious allure and the presence of chichi boutiques and upmarket shops, it remains relatively unspoiled by tourist crowds and is a wonderful place to visit.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 841206; www.visitchippingcampden.com; High St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) stocks a town trail guide with some background on the town's most historic buildings. Look out for the wonderful 17th-century **Market Hall** nearby, with its multiple gables and elaborate timber roof.

At the western end of High St is the 15th-century **St James's**, one of the great wool churches of the Cotswolds. Built in the perpendicular style, it has a magnificent tower and some wonderful 17th-century monuments. Nearby on Church St is a remarkable row of **almshouses** dating from the 17th century, and the Jacobean lodges and gateways of the now-ruined Campden House. The surviving Court Barn will open as an Arts and Crafts museum in summer 2007.

Sleeping & Eating

Manor Farm (☎ 840390; www.manorfarmbnb.demon.co.uk; s/d £50/60) Set in a beautiful 17th-centry farmhouse, this lovely B&B has all the period charm of a Cotswold home, but contemporary style and modern facilities. Along with the exposed oak beams and creaking stairs you'll find king-size beds, power showers and neutral colour schemes.

Eight Bells (☎ 840371; www.eightbellsinn.co.uk; Church St; s £50-65, d £80-115; ⊠) The oldest inn in town has had a recent makeover, banished the chintz from its bedrooms and replaced it with sleek contemporary décor that works wonderfully with the period character of this 14th-century inn. The restaurant downstairs serves a British and Continental menu (mains £8.50 to £16) in rustic settings.

our pick **Cotswold House Hotel** (☎ 840330; www.cotswoldhouse.com; The Square; r £140-285; 🅿 ⊠ 💻) Relax in utter luxury at this chic Regency town house turned boutique hotel. Bespoke furniture, massive beds, Frette linens, cashmere throws, private gardens and hot tubs are the norm here. You can dine in style at Juliana's or take a more informal approach at Hick's Brasserie (mains £8 to £17), a slick operation with an ambitious menu.

Getting There & Around

Between them buses 21 and 22 run almost hourly to Stratford-upon-Avon or Moreton-in-Marsh. Bus 21 also stops in Broadway. There are no Sunday services.

To catch a real glimpse of the countryside, try hiring a bike from **Cotswold Country Cycles** (☎ 438706; Longlands Farm Cottage; per day £12) and discovering the quiet lanes and trails around town.

BROADWAY

☎ 01386 / pop 2496

Quintessentially English, absurdly pretty and little changed since medieval times, Broadway is another stunning Cotswold village firmly on the tourist trail. The graceful golden-hued cottages set at the foot of a steep escarpment have inspired writers, artists and composers in times past, but today it's tearooms, antique shops, boutiques, art galleries and coaches that line the village green.

The **tourist office** (☎ 852937; 1 Cotswold Ct; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) is in a shopping arcade off the northern end of High St.

Beyond the charm of the village itself there are few specific attractions to visit. If you're feeling energetic the lovely, 12th-century **Church of St Eadburgha** is a signposted 30-minute walk (1 mile) from town. Near here, a more challenging path leads uphill for 2 miles to **Broadway Tower** (☎ 852390; www.broadwaytower.co.uk; adult/under 14yr £3.80/2.30; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), a crenulated, 18th-century Gothic folly on the crest of the escarpment. It has a small William Morris exhibition on one floor and stunning views from the top.

The best of the B&Bs in town is the **Olive Branch Guest House** (☎ 853440; www.theolivebranch-broadway.com; 78 High St; s £40-58, d £68-8; ☒), a lovely 16th-century home with bright, spacious rooms decked out in cosy, country-style fabrics and pine furniture. Another good bet is **Milestone House** (☎ 853432; www.milestone-broadway.co.uk; High St; s/d £45/68; P ☒), a 17th-century coaching inn with exposed beams, an inglenook fireplace and subtle florals.

For food, head for the **Broadway Brasserie** (☎ 858435; 20A High St; mains £7-11), which serves a classic range of brasserie-style food, or sleek and stylish **Russells** (☎ 853555; www.russellsofbroadway.com; 20 High St; mains £9-17; 🕒 lunch & dinner) for more upmarket modern British fare. Russells also has a selection of slick, modern rooms (£105 to £245) with simple, contemporary design, flat-screen TVs and lots of little luxuries.

Getting There & Away

Bus 22 goes to Moreton-in-Marsh, Chipping Campden and Stratford (four daily Monday to Saturday, 20 minutes) and bus 606 goes to Cheltenham (four Monday to Saturday, 50 minutes).

WINCHCOMBE

☎ 01242 / pop 3682

Capital of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia and one of the most important towns in the Cotswolds until the Middle Ages, Winchcombe is now a sleepy place with the timeless charm of a typical Cotswold town. Beautiful houses line the streets, and the picturesque cottages on Vineyard St and Dents Tce offer quintessential Cotswold views. Fine gargoyles adorn the lovely St Peter's Church and just outside the town are the evocative ruins of Cistercian **Hailes Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01242-602398; adult/under 15yr £3.30/1.70; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct), once one of the country's main pilgrimage centres.

The town's main attraction, however, is **Sudeley Castle** (☎ 604357; www.sudeleycastle.co.uk; adult/under 15yr £7.20/4.20; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Sun-Thu selected weeks Easter-Oct), once a favoured retreat of Tudor and Stuart monarchs. Much of the house is off limits to visitors, but you can get a glimpse of its grand proportions while visiting the exhibitions of costumes, memorabilia and paintings, and the surrounding gardens. To see the private apartments you'll need to join the 'Connoisseur Tours' (Wednesday 11am, 1pm, and 3pm Easter to October, tour £15).

The **tourist office** (☎ 602925; www.winchcombe.co.uk; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) is located on High St.

Sleeping & Eating

Gower House (☎ 602616; www.cotswolds.info/accommodation/gower-house.htm; 16 North St; s/d £40/53; ☒ P) Two 17th-century cottages have been converted into this lovely B&B close to the centre of town. The simple, uncluttered rooms have pine furniture, plain white bedspreads and plenty of light.

White Hart Inn (☎ 602359; www.the-white-hart-inn.com; r £65-135; ☒) The individually styled rooms at the White Hart range from simple and contemporary twins to the tartan-bedecked Highland room, the Moroccan boudoir and the four-poster Swedish room. The food is equally eclectic, with light bites at the bar (£5 to £8), pizzas (£6 to £8) in the basement and modern British fare in the main restaurant (mains £14 to £16).

our pick **5 North Street** (☎ 604566; 5 North St; 2-course lunch £18.50, 2-course dinner £28-37) Winchcombe's top spot for food is this cosy, unpretentious place that also happens to hold a prestigious Michelin star. The menu is a mix of British ingredients and French flair and promises consistently good food at surprisingly keen rates.

Getting There & Away

Bus 606 runs four times daily (Monday to Saturday) from Winchcombe to Cheltenham (25 minutes), while bus 559 goes once to Broadway (Monday to Saturday, 40 minutes).

STOW-ON-THE-WOLD

☎ 01451 / pop 2074

Stow has long held a strategic place in Cotswold history, standing as it does on the Roman Fosse Way and at the junction of six roads. At its heart is a large market square surrounded by handsome buildings and steep-walled alleyways originally used to funnel the sheep into the fair. Today the sheep have been replaced with tourists and instead of farmers brokering deals the town is full of antique shops, pretentious boutiques, tearooms and delis. It's great if you're on a pit stop from a coach tour, but all a little artificial if you're looking for true Cotswold charm.

The **tourist office** (☎ 831082; Hollis House; 🕒 9.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat) on Market Sq sells discounted tickets to local attractions.

Sleeping & Eating

Stow-on-the-Wold YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6050; www.yha.org.uk; The Square; dm £14.95; 🕒 Mar-Sep, Fri & Sat only Nov & Dec; P ☒ 💻) Slap bang on the market square, this hostel is in a wonderful 16th-century town house and has small dorms, a children's play area and a warm welcome for families.

Number 9 (☎ 870333 www.number-nine.info; 9 Park St; s £45, d £55-70; ☒) Centrally located and wonderfully atmospheric, this beautiful B&B has three simple, contemporary-styled rooms with plenty of space, brand-new bathrooms and subtle décor.

Old Butchers (☎ 831700; 7 Park St; mains £11-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Stow's top spot for dining is this chic brasserie serving up a great selection of modern British cuisine with more than a hint of Continental European influence thrown in. Expect grilled marinated quail, roast pork belly and succulent fish all done to perfection.

Eagle & Child (☎ 830670; Digbeth St; mains £9-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Smart, simple but sophisticated food is served at the Eagle and Child, supposedly England's oldest inn. The décor is all exposed beams and old-world charm, but the menu is decidedly modern, blending traditional English favourites with modern European flair.

Getting There & Away

Bus 55 links Stow with Moreton, Bourton, Northleach and Cirencester eight times daily Monday to Saturday. Bus 801 runs to Cheltenham, Moreton and Bourton four times daily Monday to Friday and nine times on Saturday.

The nearest train stations are 4 miles away at Kingham and Moreton-in-Marsh.

BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER

☎ 01451 / pop 3093

Crass, commercialised and overwhelmed by coach tours, Bourton is an exceptionally beautiful place that has sold its soul to the tourist trade. Not content with its handsome houses and stunningly picturesque low bridges over the trickling River Windrush, the town has turned theme park with a series of 'attractions' including a model railway and village, bird-conservation project, perfume factory, maze and motor museum.

If you're travelling in the high season, visit in the evening, when most of the coaches have left, or wait until the depths of winter, when the village's understated charm is free to reveal itself.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820211; www.bourtoninfo.com; Victoria St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Sat Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) can help find accommodation.

If you'd like to stay, **Larks Rise** (☎ 822613; www.larksrisehouse.co.uk; Old Gloucester Rd; r £50-80; ☒) offers beautiful, bright, simple rooms with DVD players and complimentary toiletries in a lovely Edwardian house.

For more upmarket accommodation and excellent food, the chic and stylish **Dial House** (☎ 822244; www.dialhousehotel.com; The Chestnuts; r £110-160; ☒) is the only place to go. Luxurious rooms with hand-painted wallpaper, giant beds, silky throws and a wonderful mix of period charm and designer style are on offer. The restaurant (mains lunch £8 to £10, dinner £12 to £18) serves up excellent modern British cuisine.

Buses 801 and P1 run to Cheltenham, Moreton and Stow up to four times daily Monday to Friday and nine times on Saturday.

THE SLAUGHTERS

☎ 01451

A little over a mile from Bourton and yet half a world away, the Slaughters – Upper and Lower – are some of the Cotswolds' most scenic and unspoiled villages. The names derive from the Old English 'sloughre', meaning 'slough', and despite the camera-wielding crowds that are drawn here, they maintain their unhurried medieval charm.

To see the Slaughters at their best, arrive on foot from Bourton (about 30 minutes' walk) across the fields. Your first sight of the village will be the meandering river that weaves between the glorious buildings, past the 17th-century Lower Slaughter Manor (now a top-notch hotel) to the **old mill** (☎ 820052; www.oldmill-lowerslaughter.com; admission £2; 🕐 10am-6pm Mar-Oct), which houses a small museum and teashop. From here you can continue for another mile (about 30 minutes' walk) across the fields to Upper Slaughter, with its own fine manor house and glorious cottages.

NORTHLEACH

☎ 01451 / pop 1923

Little visited and under-appreciated, Northleach is a lovely little market town of half-timbered Tudor houses, imposing merchants' stores and late-medieval cottages. There's a wonderful mix of architectural styles clustered around the gorgeous market square and the narrow laneways leading off it, but the highlight of a visit is the **Church of St Peter and St Paul**, a masterpiece of Cotswold perpendicular style.

Near the square is Oak House, a 17th-century wool house that contains **Keith Harding's World of Mechanical Music** (☎ 860181; www.mechanicalmusic.co.uk; admission £5; 🕐 10am-6pm; ♿), a fascinating museum of self-playing musical instruments, where you can hear Rachmaninoff played on a reproducing piano.

Just outside town on the A429 is the **Chedworth Roman Villa** (NT; ☎ 01242-890256; Yanworth; adult/under 18yr £5.50/3; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Feb-Mar & Nov), one of the most complete Roman villas in England. Built as a stately home in about AD 120, it contains some wonderful mosaics illustrating the seasons, bathhouses, and, a short walk away, a temple by the River Coln.

For overnight stays try **Prospect Cottage** (☎ 860875; www.prospectcottage.co.uk; West End; s/d £60/75; ☒), an atmospheric 17th-century home with bright simple rooms featuring pine furniture and spacious bathrooms. Alternatively, the **Wheatsheaf** (☎ 860244; www.wsan.co.uk; West End; s £50-60, d £60-80; ☒) has eight excellent-value en suite rooms decked out in slick contemporary style. The restaurant serves a good selection of light lunches (£6 to £8) and a modern British dinner menu (mains £11 to £13).

Getting There & Away

Swanbrook runs three buses Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday) between Cheltenham (30 minutes) and Oxford (one hour) via Northleach.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Kick-start your weekend by checking into the seductively stylish **Cotswold House Hotel** (p359) in Chipping Campden and take a sunset stroll around the village before dining at Juliana's or Hick's Brasserie. First thing the following morning, blow away the cobwebs with a short stroll and magnificent views at **Broadway Tower** (p360) and then head south to **Winchcombe** (p360), where you can loll about the lovely village or take in some history at the Tudor pile **Sudeley Castle** (p360). Stop for lunch at the seriously unpretentious but exceptionally good **5 North Street** (p361) before taking the cross-country route to stunning **Lower Slaughter** (above). If you're feeling sprightly, follow the trail over the rolling hills to Upper Slaughter or alternatively just sit and feed the ducks, before swinging back to Bourton to check into the sumptuous **Dial House** (p361) for an evening of luxury and fine food. On Sunday head east to Woodstock to ramble the grounds or the stately rooms of **Blenheim Palace** (p354) and work up an appetite for a hearty traditional lunch at the glorious thatched **Falkland Arms** (p359) in Great Tew.

CIRENCESTER

☎ 01285 / pop 15,861

Affluent, elegant and steeped in history, the charming town of Cirencester is a refreshingly unpretentious place of narrow winding streets and graceful town houses. The lovely market square is surrounded by wonderful 18th-century and Victorian architecture, while the nearby streets showcase a harmonious medley of buildings from various eras.

Under the Romans, Cirencester was second only to London in terms of size and importance and although little of this period remains, you can still see the grassed-over ruins of one of the largest amphitheatres in the country. The medieval wool trade was also good to the town, with wealthy merchants funding the building of a superb perpendicular-style church. Today, Cirencester is the most important town in the southern Cotswolds and retains an authentic, unaffected air, with the lively Monday and Friday markets as important as the expensive boutiques and trendy delis that line its narrow streets.

Pick up a copy of *Cirencester – A Town Walk* at the **tourist office** (☎ 654180; Corn Hall; 🕐 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Jan-Mar) for information on historic buildings around town.

Sights

CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Standing elegantly on the market square, cathedral-like **St John's** (donation £2; 🕐 10am-5pm) is one of England's largest parish churches. A superb perpendicular-style tower with wild flying buttresses dominates the exterior, but it is the majestic three-storey south porch that is the real highlight. Built as an office by late-15th-century abbots, it subsequently became the medieval town hall.

Soaring arches, magnificent fan vaulting and a Tudor nave adorn the light-filled interior, where you'll also find a 15th-century painted stone pulpit and memorial brasses recording the matrimonial histories of important wool merchants. The east window contains fine medieval stained glass, while a wall safe displays the **Boleyn Cup**, made for Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, in 1535.

CORINIUM MUSEUM

Modern design, innovative displays and computer reconstructions bring one of Britain's largest collections of Roman artefacts to life at the **Corinium Museum** (☎ 655611; www.cotswolds.gov.uk/museum; Park St; adult/under 16yr £3.50/2; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). You can dress as a Roman soldier, meet an Anglo-Saxon princess and discover what Cirencester was like during its heyday as a wealthy medieval wool town. Highlights of the Roman collection include the beautiful Hunting Dogs and Four Seasons floor mosaics and a reconstructed Roman kitchen and butcher's shop.

Sleeping & Eating

Old Brewhouse (☎ 656099; www.theoldbrewhouse.com; 7 London Rd; s £45-50, d £55-65; Ⓟ ☒) Set in a charming 17th-century town house, this lovely B&B has bright, pretty rooms with cast-iron beds and subtle, country-style florals or patchwork quilts. The beautiful garden room even has its own patio.

Leauses (☎ 653643; www.theleauses.co.uk; 101 Victoria Rd; s £45-50, d£55-60; Ⓟ ☒) This Victorian house offers a range of calm guest rooms with plenty of period features and modern amenities. Elegant but understated décor, soothing colour schemes and good bathrooms make it a great deal.

our pick **Jesse's Bistro** (☎ 641497; Blackjack St; mains £7-15; 🕐 lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) Hidden away in a cobbled stableyard with its own fishmonger and cheese shop, this great little place has flagstone floors, wrought-iron chairs and mosaic tables. The modern menu features a selection of great dishes, but the real treat is the fresh fish and meat cooked in the wood-burning oven.

1651 (☎ 658507; Market Pl; mains £11-16; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Stripped wood floors, red walls and a modern Mediterranean menu make 1651 one of the best dining spots in town. It's a stylish place in the Fleece Hotel and serves dishes such as pan-fried monkfish with leek, braised fennel and tamarind jus.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses run roughly hourly from Cirencester to London (£17, 2½ hours) and to Cheltenham Spa (30 minutes) and Gloucester (one hour). Stagecoach bus 51 also runs to Cheltenham hourly Monday to Saturday (40 minutes). Bus 852 goes to Gloucester four times daily Monday to Saturday.

BIBURY

☎ 01285 / pop 623

Firmly on the tourist trail and thoroughly overexposed, the gorgeous village of Bibury is best seen early in the morning or in the soft golden light of the setting sun. Its impossibly quaint collection of riverside buildings prompted William Morris to describe it as ‘the most beautiful village in England’, and at a quiet moment it’s hard to disagree.

For many visitors Bibury’s chief attraction is **Arlington Row**, a stunning sweep of riverside cottages now thought to be the most photographed street in Britain. Also worth a look is the 17th-century **Arlington Mill**, just a short stroll away. Few visitors make it past these two sights, but for a glimpse of the real Bibury you should venture into the village proper behind Arlington Row, where you’ll find a cluster of stunning cottages and the Saxon **Church of St Mary**.

If you’d like to stay overnight, the riverside **Swan** (☎ 740695; www.swanhotel.co.uk; r £140-220; 🚭) is a 17th-century coaching inn with a selection of classically styled rooms with billowing swag curtains, cute florals and chunky beds.

Buses 860, 863, 865, 866 and 869 pass through Bibury en route to Cirencester at least once daily from Monday to Saturday (20 minutes).

TETBURY

☎ 01666 / pop 5250

From medieval cottages to Georgian Gothic gems, Tetbury is an unspoilt town of stunning buildings and numerous antique shops. Once a prosperous wool-trading centre, Tetbury has managed to preserve most of its architectural heritage and is well worth a wander. A row of gorgeous medieval weavers’ cottages lines the steep hill at **Chipping Steps** and lead up to the **Chipping**, which is surrounded by graceful 17th- and 18th-century town houses. From here it’s a short stroll to Market Sq, where the 17th-century **Market House** stands as if on stilts. Close by, the Georgian Gothic **Church of St Mary the Virgin** has a towering spire and wonderful interior.

Just south of Tetbury is the **National Arboretum** (☎ 880220; www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt; adult £5-7.50, under 18yr £1; 🕐 10am-dusk) at Westonbirt. The park boasts a magnificent selection of temperate trees, with some wonderful walks and great colour throughout the year, especially in autumn.

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 503552; www.tetbury.org; 33 Church St; 🕐 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 9.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) has plenty of information on the town and its history and stocks a trail guide to the arboretum.

Sleeping & Eating

Number 65 (☎ 503346; www.number65.co.uk; 65 Long St; s £30, d £50-65; 🚭) This unassuming restaurant has a couple of simple, country-style guest rooms on offer and serves up a modern British menu (three-course set menu £26) featuring such delicacies as pistachio and almond rissole with roasted pepper purée.

Ormond’s Head (☎ 505690; www.theormond.co.uk; 23 Long St; s £60, d £85-95; 🚭 Ⓟ) You’ll find bright, modern rooms with minimalist décor at the Ormond, a good-value place in the centre of town. The modern bar and grill downstairs serve excellent-value food (mains £8 to £15).

Blue Zucchini (☎ 505852; 7-9 Church St; dinner mains £11-15; 🕐 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Bright, cheery and usually buzzing, this modern brasserie-bar is as good for a quick read of the paper with a coffee and fresh pastry, as for a lunchtime panini or pizza (£6 to £8) or a strapping evening meal.

Getting There & Away

Bus 29 runs between Tetbury and Stroud (30 minutes) six times daily Monday to Saturday. Bus 620 goes to Bath (1¼ hours) six times daily Monday to Friday and four times on Saturday, stopping at the National Arboretum en route.

PAINSWICK

☎ 01452 / pop 1666

Largely untouched, totally unassuming and gloriously uncommercialised, Painswick is a real gem. This gorgeous Cotswold village is a maze of narrow winding streets lined with picture-perfect cottages, handsome stone town houses and medieval inns. Despite its obvious charm, Painswick sees only a trickle of visitors and you can wander the backstreets here and feel genuinely lost in time.

The village centres on **St Mary’s Church**, a fine perpendicular wool church surrounded by table-top tombs and 99 clipped yew trees. Legend has it that, should the hundredth yew tree be allowed to grow, the devil would appear and shrivel it. They planted it anyway – to celebrate the millennium – but there’s been no sign of the Wicked One.

Sliding downhill beside and behind the church is a series of gorgeous streetscapes. Look out for Bisley St, the original main drag, which was superseded by the now ancient-looking New St in medieval times. Just south of the church, rare iron stocks stand in the street.

The **tourist office** (☎ 813552; Library, Stroud Rd; 🕐 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) has information on short walks in the area and the **Cotswold Way**, which runs through the village.

Painswick Rococo Garden

Just a mile north of town, the ostentatious **Painswick Rococo Garden** (☎ 813204; www.rococogarden.co.uk; adult/under 16yr £5/2.50; 🕐 11am-5pm Jan-Oct) is the area’s biggest attraction. These flamboyant pleasure gardens were designed by Benjamin Hyett in the 1740s and have now been restored to their former glory. Winding paths soften the otherwise strict geometrical precision, and bring visitors around the central vegetable garden to the many Gothic follies dotted in the grounds. There’s also a children’s nature trail and maze.

Sleeping & Eating

Hambutts Mynd (☎ 812352; www.hambuttsmyndguesthouse.co.uk; Edge Rd; s £30-36, d £60; Ⓟ 🚭) Set on the edge of the village with lovely views from the rooms, this converted, early-18th-century corn mill has simple but comfortable rooms with tasteful décor.

Cardynham House (☎ 814006; www.cardynham.co.uk; The Cross; s£50-59 d £69-185; 🚭 🏊) The individually decorated rooms at 15th-century Cardynham House offer four-poster beds, heavy patterned fabrics and buckets of character. Choose the Shaker-style New England room, bright and airy Palm Beach or chintzy Cottage Rose.

Downstairs in Cardynham House, the **March Hare** (☎ 813452; set menu £24; 🕐 7-10pm Tue-Sat) Thai restaurant is probably the best place to eat in town.

Getting There & Around

Bus 46 connects Cheltenham (30 minutes) with Painswick hourly Monday to Saturday. Bus 256 connects Painswick to Gloucester twice daily on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The unhurried charm of Gloucestershire is one of is greatest pleasures, and after the crowds and commercialism of the Cotswolds it’s an authentic alternative, with its fair share of mellow stone villages and rustic allure. Here too is the elegant Regency town of Cheltenham with its graceful, tree-lined terraces and upmarket boutiques, and the county capital, Gloucester, with its magnificent Gothic cathedral. Tudor Tewkesbury, to the north, has a gracious Norman abbey and numerous half-timbered houses, while to the west, the historic Forest of Dean is a leafy backwater crisscrossed by numerous trails and littered with vestiges of its mining past.

Information

Much of Gloucestershire falls into the Cotswold district and information on sights, activities, accommodation and transport can be found on www.glos-cotswolds.com.

Activities

The quiet roads, gentle gradients and numerous footpaths in Gloucestershire make it perfect for walking and cycling. Tourist offices can help with route planning and stock numerous guides to the trails.

Compass Holidays (☎ 250642; www.compass-holidays.com; bikes per 2 days/week from £34/64) hires bikes and also offers a bag-drop service (£6) and guided cycling tours of the area.

Getting Around

A host of companies operate bus services in Gloucestershire. Most tourist offices stock local bus timetables or can help with finding connecting services. As always, **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) has details of all routes.

GLOUCESTER

☎ 01452 / pop 123,205

Despite its glorious Norman cathedral and glimmer of medieval character, workaday Gloucester (pronounced *glos*-ter) is forever destined to live in the shadow of its more glamorous neighbour. Yet unlike glitzy Cheltenham it’s a refreshingly unpretentious place, and between the modern architectural blunders and steak-and-kidney-pie cafés, the city is beginning to transform its fortunes, redeveloping its historic docks into trendy apartments and heaving itself out of financial decline.

Gloucester began life as a Roman settlement for retired soldiers, built its wealth on profits from river trade and its reputation during a period of medieval piety. For a while the good times rolled but as trade shifted to Bristol the city fell into serious decline. In modern times Gloucester prospered on the back of heavy industry and is only today beginning to heal the scars left from this time.

Orientation & Information

The city centre is based on a medieval cruciform pattern, with Northgate, Southgate, Eastgate and Westgate Sts converging on The Cross. The **tourist office** (☎ 396572; 28 Southgate St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 11am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug) is in the centre of town and there's an additional **information point** (🕒 10.30am-3.30pm) at Merchant's Quay in the docks.

If you don't mind queuing, **Gloucester Library** (☎ 426973; Brunswick Rd; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Wed & Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) has free internet access. Otherwise, head for **Surf Scorpio** (☎ 528030; 135 Eastgate St; per hr £1.50; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun).

Sights

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

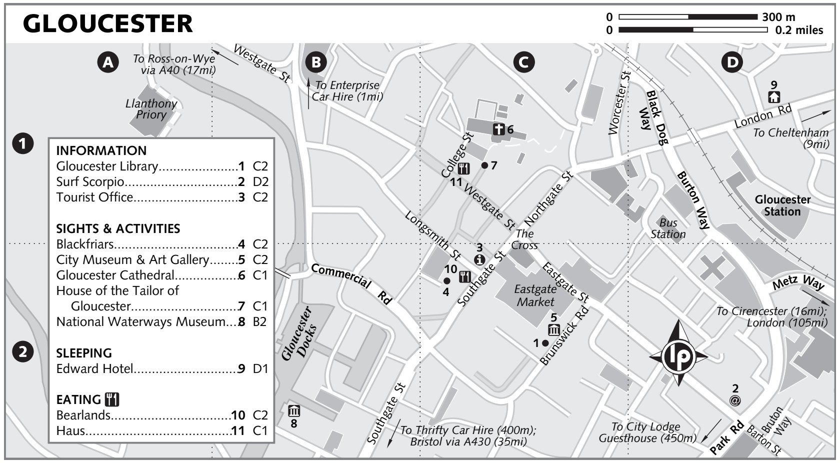
The main reason to visit Gloucester is to see its magnificent Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 528095; www.gloucestercathedral.org.uk; College Green; suggested donation £3; 🕒 7.30am-6pm), a stunning example of English perpendicular style. Originally the site of a Saxon abbey, a Norman church was built here by a group of Benedictine monks in the 12th century and when Edward II was murdered in 1327 the church was chosen as his burial place.

Edward's tomb proved so popular, however, that Gloucester became a centre of pilgrimage and the income generated from the pious pilgrims financed the church's conversion into the magnificent building seen today. Inside, the cathedral skilfully combines the best of Norman and Gothic design, with thick, sturdy columns along the nave creating a sense of gracious solidity, and wonderful Norman arcading draped with beautiful mouldings. From the elaborate 14th-century wooden choir stalls you'll get a good view of the imposing eastern window, one of the largest in England.

To see the window in more detail, head for the **Tribune Gallery**, where you can also see an **exhibition** (admission £2; 🕒 10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-3pm Sat) on its making. As you walk around the **Whispering Gallery** you'll notice that even the quietest of murmurs reverberates across the wonderfully elaborate lierne vaulting. Beneath the window in the northern ambulatory is Edward II's magnificent tomb and, nearby, the late-15th-century **Lady Chapel**, a glorious patchwork of stained glass.

One of the cathedral's greatest treasures, however, is the exquisite **Great Cloister**. Completed in 1367, it is the first example of fan vaulting in England and is only matched in beauty by Henry VIII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey. You (or your children) might recognise the cloister from the first two Harry Potter films: it was used in the corridor scenes at Hogwart's School.

For more cathedral insights and a fantastic view of the town you can climb the 68.5m **tower** on an hour-long guided **tour** (adult/under 16yr £2.50/1; 🕒 tours 2.30pm Wed-Fri, 1.30pm & 2.30pm Sat & Bank Holidays). Because of the steep steps it's not recommended for children under 10. Civic Trust volunteers also provide free **guided tours** (🕒 10.30am-3pm Mon-Sat, noon-2pm Sun) of the cathedral.


GLOUCESTER
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A
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To Ross-on-Wye via A40 (17mi)
Westgate St
To Enterprise Car Hire (1mi)
Llanthony Priory
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Westgate St
Northgate St
Longsmith St
The Cross
Southgate St
Eastgate St
Eastgate Market
Brunswick Rd
Commercial Rd
Gloucester Docks
Southgate St
Worcester St
Black Dog Way
Burton Way
London Rd
To Cheltenham (9mi)
Gloucester Station
Bus Station
Metz Way
To Cirencester (16mi); London (105mi)
To Thrifty Car Hire (400m); Bristol via A430 (35mi)
To City Lodge Guesthouse (450m)
Park Rd
Barton St
Bruton Way

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A major part of the city's regeneration is taking place at Gloucester Docks, once Britain's largest inland port. Fifteen beautiful Victorian warehouses, many now restored, surround the canal basins and house a series of museums, shops and cafés.

The largest warehouse, Llanthony, is home to the excellent **National Waterways Museum** (☎ 318200; www.nwm.org.uk; adult/under 16yr £6.60/5.25; 🕒 10am-5pm), a hands-on kind of place where you can discover the history of inland waterways. There's a collection of historic boats and plenty of interactive exhibits that are great for children.

Also worth visiting are 13th-century **Blackfriars** (Ladybellgate St; admission free), one of Britain's best-preserved Dominican friaries, and the **Gloucester City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 396131; www.gloucester.gov.uk/citymuseum; Brunswick Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), which houses everything from dinosaur fossils and Roman artefacts to paintings by Turner and Gainsborough.

Tours

The Civic Trust runs one-hour guided **walking tours** (☎ 396572; adult/under 16yr £2.50/free; 🕒 tours 11am Mon-Sat Jun-Aug) of the city leaving from the tourist office on Southgate St, as well as **historic dock tours** (adult/under 16yr £2.50/free; 🕒 tours 11am Sat & Sun Jun & Jul) leaving from the information point at Merchant's Quay. On Sunday during August it also runs **Blackfriars tours** (adult/under 16yr £5.50/free; 🕒 tours 3pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Gloucester's hotels are a grim lot and you'd be wise to consider staying in Cheltenham instead.

City Lodge Guesthouse (☎ 526380; www.citylodgeguesthouse.co.uk; 72 Weston Rd; s £25-29, d £39-49; P 💻) This bargain B&B offers basic but clean and comfortable rooms close to the city centre. The décor is pretty nondescript and cheaper rooms share a bathroom, but you can't argue with the price.

Edward Hotel (☎ 525865; www.edwardhotel-gloucester.co.uk; 88-92 London Rd; s £45-55, d £60-70; P 🚭) The individually styled rooms at this Victorian town house vary greatly from relatively bright and simple to seriously fussy. Ask to look at a few before deciding.

Haus (☎ 525359; 56 Westgate; mains lunch £3.50-7, dinner £9-20; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Slick décor, leather sofas, dark woods and an interesting menu make this contemporary bar and restaurant one of the top spots in town. There are light and interesting lunches, meze (£3.50) and a modern European evening menu.

Bearlands (☎ 419966; Longsmith St; 2-course lunch/dinner £12/20) Another stylish joint, Bearlands is a light-filled place as popular for quiet drinks as a special meal. The menu features dishes such as supreme of pheasant with a warm apricot and cinnamon stuffing, and the drinks menu is tailored to suit.

THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER

Beatrix Potter's magical tale of good-hearted mice saving a feverish Gloucester tailor from ruin was inspired by a local legend about real-life tailor John Prichard. As in Potter's tale, he left the garment at cutting stage on a Friday night and returned on Monday to find it finished.

Commercially minded Mr Prichard was soon encouraging people to come in and see where 'waistcoats are made at night by the fairies'. In reality, his two assistants had slept off a Saturday night bender at the workshop and hoped to make amends by finishing the coat.

The original house that Potter used in her illustrations is at 9 College Ct and is due to reopen as an attraction once funding has been secured.

Getting There & Away

National Express has buses roughly every two hours to London (£17, 3½ hours). Bus 94 runs to Cheltenham every 10 minutes (30 minutes), with express bus X94 cutting the journey to 15 minutes during rush hour. The quickest journey between the two cities is by train (10 minutes, every 20 minutes).

AROUND GLOUCESTER

Forest of Dean

☎ 01594 / pop 79,982

The steep hills, winding tree-lined roads, lakes and unspoilt vistas of the Forest of Dean make for excellent touring by car, foot or bike. The area, England's first National Forest Park, was formerly a royal hunting ground and a centre of iron and coal mining, and its mysterious depths were supposedly the inspiration for JRR Tolkien's setting for *The Lord of the Rings.*

Coleford, the main population centre, has good transport connections to Gloucester. The **tourist office** (☎ 812388; www.visitforestofdean.co.uk; High St, Coleford; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) stocks walking and cycling guides and also offers a free accommodation booking service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Your first stop should be the **Dean Heritage Centre** (☎ 822170; www.deanheritagemuseum.com; Camp Mill, Soudley; adult/under 16yr £4.50/2.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Feb, Mar & Oct), which explains the history of the forest and its free miners from medieval times to the industrial age. There's also a reconstructed forest home, adventure playground and art gallery on site.

If you're travelling with children, **Puzzle Wood** (☎ 833187; adult/under 12yr £3.25/2.25; 🕒 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Easter-Sep, 11am-4pm Feb & Oct) is a must. This overgrown pre-Roman, open-cast ore mine has a maze of paths, weird rock formations, tangled vines and eerie passageways and offers a real sense of discovery. Puzzle Wood is a mile south of Coleford on the B4228.

Mined for iron ore for more than 4000 years, the **Clearwell Caves** (☎ 832535; www.clearwellcaves.com; adult/under 16yr £4.50/2.80; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct) are a warren of passageways, caverns and pools that help explain the forest's history of mining. The caves are signposted off the B4228 a mile south of Coleford.

In Newland you can visit the 'Cathedral of the Forest', the 13th-century **All Saints**. The church was restored and partially rebuilt in the 19th century and houses some fine stained-glass windows as well as a unique brass depicting a miner with a *nelly* (tallow candle) in his mouth, a pick in his hand and a *billy* (backpack) on his back.

SLEEPING & EATING

our pick St Briavels Castle YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6040; www.yha.org.uk; Lydney; dm £17.90; 🅿 🚭) Set in an imposing moated castle once used as King John's hunting lodge, this hostel offers the chance to live like a medieval lord for a night. One of the most unique hostels in the country, it's well worth considering whatever your budget. There are lively medieval banquets on Wednesday and Saturday nights in August.

Tan House Farm (☎ 832222; pchamberlain@cix.co.uk; Laundry Lane, Newland; s £25, d £60-64; 🅿) Set in a wonderfully imposing former tannery complete with a 16th-century drying barn, this lovely B&B has simple, elegant rooms and tranquil gardens just dripping with character.

Forest House Hotel (☎ 832424; www.forest-house-hotel.co.uk; Cinder Hill, Coleford; s/d £45/65; 🅿 🚭) This recently refurbished 18th-century house offers a selection of tastefully furnished rooms with simple décor and good bathrooms. The Bluebell restaurant downstairs is a good bet for modern British food (mains £13 to £19).

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From Gloucester, bus 31 runs to Coleford roughly every half-hour (one hour) and there are hourly trains to Lydney (20 minutes). The **Dean Forest Railway** (☎ 843423; www.deanforestrailway.co.uk) runs steam trains from Lydney to Parkend (day ticket adult/under 16 years £8/5) on selected days from March to October.

You can hire bikes (£13 per day), buy maps and get advice on cycling routes at **Pedalabikeaway** (☎ 860065; www.pedalabikeaway.com; Cannop Valley, nr Coleford).

CHELTENHAM

☎ 01242 / pop 98,875

Riddled with historic buildings and still exuding the gracious air of an 18th-century spa resort, Cheltenham is a cosmopolitan hub at the centre of the rustic Cotswolds. The town grew dramatically after its spa waters were discovered in 1716 and in its heyday rivalled Bath as *the* place for the sick, hypochondriac and merely moneyed to go.

Today its period charms and elegant architecture attract a well-heeled class of resident and the leafy crescents, beautifully proportioned terraces, wrought-iron balconies and expansive parks are kept in top condition. Cheltenham also has a reputation for partying on a grand scale, with festivals of national importance held during the year, and there's a host of fine hotels, restaurants and expensive boutiques, making it a popular base for exploring the region.

History

Cheltenham languished in the relative obscurity of most Cotswold towns until the local pigeons began eating and thriving on the salt crystals from a local spring in the early 18th century. Soon several pumps had been bored, property speculators were throwing up terraced housing and the sick were arriving in droves. By the time George III visited in 1788 the town's fate had been sealed and Cheltenham became the most fashionable holiday destination for England's upper crust. The town retained its period glamour and allure over the years and today Cheltenham is the most complete Regency town in England.

Orientation

Central Cheltenham is fairly compact and easy to get around on foot. High St runs roughly east–west; south from it is The Promenade, a more elegant shopping area, which extends into Montpellier, the most exclusive area of town. Pittville Park and the old Pump Room are about a mile north of High St.

The bus station is behind The Promenade in the town centre, but the train station is out on a limb to the west; bus D runs to the town centre every 10 minutes.

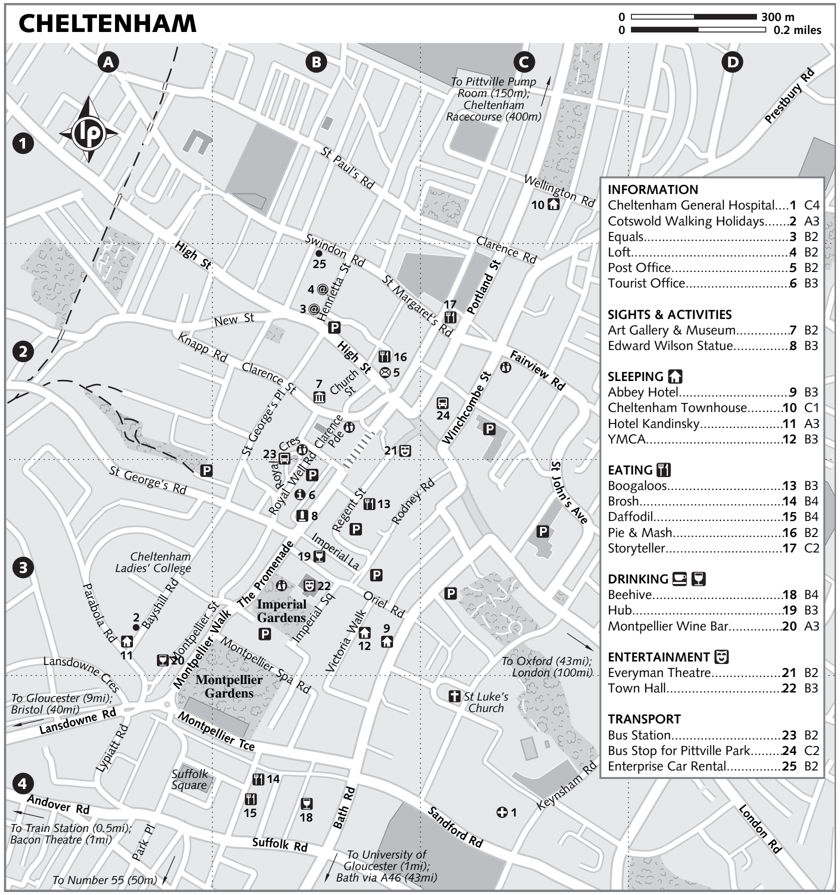
Information

You'll find all the major banks and the main post office on High St. The **tourist office** (☎ 522878; www.visitcheltenham.info; 77 The Promenade; 🕒 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat) runs a free accommodation booking service, sells event tickets and stocks copies of walking, cycling and driving guides to the Cotswolds. For internet access try **Equals** (☎ 237292; 287 High St; per 30min £2) or **The Loft** (☎ 539573; 8-9 Henrietta St; per hr £3).

Sights

THE PROMENADE & MONTPELLIER

Famed as one of England's most beautiful streetscapes, The Promenade is a wide, tree-lined boulevard flanked by imposing period buildings. The Municipal Offices, built as


CHELTENHAM
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To Pittville Pump Room (150m); Cheltenham Racecourse (400m)
St Paul's Rd
Wellington Rd
Prestbury Rd
High St
Swindon Rd
Henrietta St
St Margaret's Rd
Clarence Rd
Portland St
New St
Knapp Rd
Clarence St
Church St
Fairview Rd
Winchcombe St
St George's Pl
Royal Cres
Clarence Pde
Royal Well Rd
St George's Rd
St John's Ave
Regent St
Rodney Rd
Imperial La
Cheltenham Ladies' College
The Promenade
Imperial Gardens
Imperial Sq
Oriel Rd
Parabola Rd
Bayshill Rd
Montpellier St
Montpellier Walk
Montpellier Spa Rd
Victoria Walk
Lansdowne Cres
Montpellier Gardens
To Gloucester (9mi); Bristol (40mi)
Lansdowne Rd
Montpellier Tce
To Oxford (43mi); London (100mi)
St Luke's Church
Lypiatt Rd
Suffolk Square
Andover Rd
To Train Station (0.5mi); Bacon Theatre (1mi)
Park Pl
Suffolk Rd
Bath Rd
To University of Gloucester (1mi); Bath via A46 (43mi)
Sandford Rd
Keynsham Rd
London Rd
To Number 55 (50m)
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INFORMATION		
Cheltenham General Hospital	1	C4
Cotswold Walking Holidays	2	A3
Equals	3	B2
Loft	4	B2
Post Office	5	B2
Tourist Office	6	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Art Gallery & Museum	7	B2
Edward Wilson Statue	8	B3

SLEEPING		
Abbey Hotel	9	B3
Cheltenham Townhouse	10	C1
Hotel Kandinsky	11	A3
YMCA	12	B3

EATING		
Boogaloos	13	B3
Brosh	14	B4
Daffodil	15	B4
Pie & Mash	16	B2
Storyteller	17	C2

DRINKING		
Beehive	18	B4
Hub	19	B3
Montpellier Wine Bar	20	A3

ENTERTAINMENT		
Everyman Theatre	21	B2
Town Hall	22	B3

TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	23	B2
Bus Stop for Pittville Park	24	C2
Enterprise Car Rental	25	B2

private residences in 1825, are among the most striking on this street and face a **statue of Edward Wilson** (1872–1912), a local man who joined Captain Scott's ill-fated second expedition to the South Pole.

Continuing on from here you'll pass the grandiose **Imperial Gardens**, built to service the Imperial Spa (now the Queens Hotel), en route to **Montpellier**, Cheltenham's most fashionable district. Along with the handsome architecture of the area, there's a buzzing collection of bars, restaurants and boutiques. Along Montpellier Walk **caryatids** (draped female figures based on those on the Acropolis in Athens) act as structural supports between the shops, each balancing an elaborately carved cornice on its head.

PITTVILLE PUMP ROOM

Built in 1830 as a centrepiece to a vast estate, the **Pittville Pump Room** (☎ 523852; Pittville Park; admission free; 🕓 10am-4pm Wed-Mon) is Cheltenham's finest Regency building. Originally used as a spa and social centre, it is now used for occasional art exhibitions and summer concerts. You can still take the spa waters here or just explore the remarkable building and vast parklands and lake it overlooks.

ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

Cheltenham's excellent **Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 237431; www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk; Clarence St; admission free; 🕓 10am-5.20pm Mon-Sat) is well worth a visit for its depiction of Cheltenham life through the ages. It also has wonderful displays on William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as Dutch and British art, rare Chinese and English ceramics and a section on Edward Wilson's expedition to Antarctica.

CHELTENHAM RACECOURSE

Cheltenham is more famous in some circles for its horse racing than its architecture, and the town's racecourse can attract up to 40,000 punters a day during an event simply known as 'The Festival'. Held in mid-March each year, this is England's premier steeplechase event and is attended by droves of breeders, trainers, riders and race enthusiasts. To experience what all the fuss is about you'll need to buy your **tickets** (☎ 226226; www.cheltenham.co.uk) well in advance.

Otherwise, you can visit the **Hall of Fame museum** (☎ 513014; admission free; 🕓 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), which charts the history of steeplechasing since 1819.

Tours

Guided 1¼-hour **walking tours** (£3; 🕓 11am Mon-Fri, 11.30am Sat late Jun–mid-Sep) of Regency Cheltenham depart from the tourist office. A rolling programme of day-long **coach tours** (adult/under 16yr £28/20) to various locations in the Cotswolds can also be booked through the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Cheltenham is renowned as a city of festivals and throughout the year you'll find major events going on in the city. For more information or to book tickets visit www.cheltenhamfestivals.com.

Folk Festival (February) A showcase of traditional and new-age folk talent.

The National Hunt Festival (March) The hottest week in the racing calendar on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Jazz Festival (April) An imaginative programme hailed as the UK's finest jazz fest.

Science Festival (June) Exploring the delights and intrigues of the world of science.

Music Festival (July) A celebration of traditional and contemporary sounds with a geographical theme.

Literature Festival (October) A 10-day celebration of writers and the written word.

Sleeping

Cheltenham has an excellent choice of hotels and B&Bs, but you'll need to book as far in advance as possible during the festivals – especially for race week.

YMCA (☎ 524024; www.cheltenhamymca.com; 6 Victoria Walk; dm/s £16.50/25) This elegant building right in the city centre now houses the cheapest beds in town. The four-bed dorms are fairly basic and well worn, but the price includes breakfast and access to the attached fitness centre.

Number 55 (☎ 584915; www.number55.co.uk; 55 Painswick Rd; s £30-40, d £55-70; P ☒ 💻) Simple, contemporary rooms with white linens and original fireplaces are available at this new B&B just minutes' walk from Montpellier. It's an ideal location and excellent value.

Cheltenham Guesthouse (☎ 521726; www.cheltenhamguesthouse.biz; 145 Hewlett Rd; s £32.50-37.50, d £55-65; P ☒ 💻) This guesthouse has individually themed rooms in a Victorian house with an exotic vibe.

Abbey Hotel (☎ 516053; www.abbeyhotel-cheltenham.com; 14-16 Bath Pde; s/d £40/70; P ☒) Conveniently situated in the centre of town, the Abbey offers good, comfortable rooms in a perfect location. The décor is tasteful, if not memorable, but a good deal at these rates.

Hotel Kandinsky (☎ 527788; www.hotelkandinsky.com; Bayshill Rd; s £75, d £105-130; P ☒) Gloriously quirky, keenly priced and extravagantly decked out, this is a 'funkier than average' hotel, with lots of eclectic modern art, exotic furniture, designer style and an extremely efficient but laid-back attitude. The slick restaurant (mains £9 to £16) serves an ambitious modern British menu and residents get access to the über cool members-only U-bahn bar and club.

Eating

Cheltenham has a host of good restaurants to eat in. Stroll through Montpellier for a choice of the city's finest.

Boogaloos (☎ 702259; 16 Regent St; mains £5-10; 🕓 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Chilled out Boogaloos serves up tasty sandwiches, salads and hot lunches in a cosy Georgian town house with warm colours, big sofas and mellow music. Make up your own sandwich or go for pasta, fish cakes or hot dishes such as chicken with mozzarella and basil.

Pie & Mash (☎ 702785; 10 Bennington St; mains £5-10; 🕓 dinner Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) Wholesome to the core, this certified organic restaurant serves up hearty pies, sausages, puddings and flavoured mash designed with meat-eaters, vegans, veggies, coeliacs and diabetics in mind. There's even organic beers, wines and champagnes, and live music on Saturday evening.

Storyteller (☎ 250343; 11 North Pl; mains £6-15; 🕓 lunch & dinner) Enduringly popular for its generous proportions, buzzing atmosphere and extensive menu, this place serves up comfort food with an innovative twist. It's got the kind of menu where you'll be spoiled for choice, with inspiration from Mexico to the Mediterranean.

Brosh (☎ 227277; 8 Suffolk Pde; mains £12-18; 🕓 lunch & dinner Wed-Sat) Small, quirky and brave enough to take on the Montpellier big boys, this lovely little place has white walls, dark wood tables and a menu of interesting Middle Eastern and Mediterranean dishes.

Daffodil (☎ 700055; 18-20 Suffolk Pde; mains £14-19; 🕓 lunch & dinner; ♿) A Cheltenham institution, this converted Art Deco cinema harks back to the roaring '20s and serves up a top-notch selection of modern English brasserie food with a dollop of French and Mediterranean influences thrown in. Come on a Monday night for live jazz and blues.

Drinking

Beehive (☎ 579443; 1-3 Montpellier Villas; 🕓 noon-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) A traditional boozer with a modern take on quirky cool, this perennially popular pub is a jumble of mismatched furniture, chilled-out clientele and bar-room games. There's a courtyard garden and a surprisingly good restaurant (mains £8 to £12) upstairs.

Hub (☎ 238001; 1A Imperial Lane; admission £2-5; 🕓 9pm-2am Thu-Sat & Mon) This late-night club and music venue has two bars, live bands, top-name guest DJs and a groovy attitude. The music ranges from hip-hop and drum 'n' bass to funk, and pulls in the crowds all weekend.

Montpellier Wine Bar (☎ 527774; Bayshill Lodge, Montpellier St; 🕓 10am-11pm) Slick, sophisticated and self-consciously cool, this is where Cheltenham's beautiful people come to hang out, sip wine and dine on modern British food (mains £7 to £14). There's an extensive wine list, cask ales and plenty of people-watching.

Entertainment

The **Everyman Theatre** (☎ 572573; www.everymantheatre.org.uk; Regent St) is Cheltenham's main stage and hosts everything from Elvis impersonators to comedy and panto, while the modern **Bacon Theatre** (☎ 258002; www.bacontheatre.co.uk; Hatherly Rd) showcases touring shows, jazz and ballet. Classical music lovers should look out for concerts at the **Pittville Pump Room** (☎ 523852; Pittville Park), while the **town hall** (☎ 227979; Imperial Sq) offers more mainstream talent as well as hosting many festival events.

Getting There & Away

For information on public transport to and from Cheltenham, pick up a free copy of the handy *Getting There by Public Transport* guide from the tourist office.

BUS

National Express runs buses to London roughly hourly (£17.00, 3½ hours) and Swanbrook bus 853 goes to Oxford three times daily Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday, £6.50, 1½ hours).

Bus 94 runs to Gloucester every 10 minutes (30 minutes), Monday to Saturday, every 20 minutes on Sunday. Bus 51 goes to Cirencester hourly (40 minutes).

Pulhams bus 801 runs to Moreton (one hour) via Bourton (35 minutes) and Stow (50 minutes) seven times daily Monday to Saturday. Castleways Coaches 606 runs four times daily to Broadway (50 minutes) via Winchcombe (20 minutes), Monday to Saturday.

TRAIN

Cheltenham has trains to London (£50, 2¼ hours), Bristol (£8.10, 50 minutes) and Gloucester (£2.80, 10 minutes) roughly every half-hour, and hourly services to Bath (£12.50, 1¼ hours).

Getting Around

Compass Holidays (☎ 250642; www.compass-holidays.com; bikes per 2 days/week from £34/64) has bicycles for hire at the train station.

TEWKESBURY

☎ 01684 / pop 9978

Crooked half-timbered houses, buckled rooflines and narrow alleyways lined with medieval buildings give Tudor-heavy Tewkesbury a higgledy-piggledy charm. There's also a lovely riverside area with ancient passageways leading up to Church St, where you'll find the town's most glorious building, the magnificent medieval abbey church.

The **tourist office** (☎ 295027; www.tewkesburybc.gov.uk; 64 Barton St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10-4pm Sun) is housed in a 15th-century timber-framed house, which is also home to a small **museum** displaying finds from Roman and medieval times.

Tewkesbury Abbey

Magnificent **Tewkesbury Abbey** (☎ 850959; www.tewkesburyabbey.org.uk; suggested donation £2; 🕒 7.30am-6pm) is one of Britain's largest churches, far bigger than many of the country's cathedrals. The Norman abbey, built for the Benedictine monks, was consecrated in 1121 and was one of the last monasteries to be dissolved by Henry VIII. Although many of the monastery buildings were destroyed, the abbey church survived after being bought by the townspeople for the princely sum of £453.

The church has a massive 40m-high tower and some spectacular Norman piers and arches in the nave. The Decorated-style chancel dates from the 14th century, however, and still retains much of its original stained glass. The church also features an organ dating from 1631, which was originally made for Magdalen College, Oxford, and an extensive collection of medieval tombs. The most interesting is that of John Wakeman, the last abbot, who is shown as a vermin-ridden skeleton.

A **visitor centre** (🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), by the gate, houses an exhibition on the abbey's history.

Sleeping & Eating

Ivydene House (☎ 592453; www.ivydenehouse.net; Uckinghall; s/d £35/60; 🅿) Slightly out of town but well worth the effort, Ivydene is a real gem, offering gorgeous rooms at excellent rates. On top of the charming but contemporary rooms there are large gardens, a tennis court and log fires to enjoy.

Royal Hop Pole (☎ 293236; www.royalhoppole.co.uk; Church St; s £55-75, d £65-90; 🅿 🚭) Right in the centre of town and one of the oldest inns around, this imposing half-timbered place offers period-style rooms with exposed beams and frumpy décor. There's a garden leading down to the river, and a restaurant serving a competent modern British menu (mains £10 to £13).

Aubergine (☎ 292703; 73 Church St; mains £7-13; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Set in a 15th-century building but decidedly modern inside, this place is a welcome change from Tewkesbury's tearooms. The menu ranges from standard fare to more adventurous dishes such as venison casserole with honey and roast cardamom vegetables.

Getting There & Away

Bus 41 runs to Cheltenham every 15 minutes (hourly on Sunday, 25 minutes) and 71 goes to Gloucester hourly (30 minutes). The nearest train station is at Ashchurch, 1.5 miles away.

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Southeast England

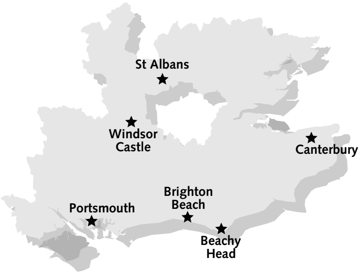
A region riddled by contradictions, the southeast of England skips effortlessly between natural beauty and rock-candy kitsch, rich history and cutting-edge culture. The closest stretch of land to Continental Europe, it has a rough-and-ready military heritage. Yet thanks to its proximity to London it's also a middle-class stronghold of cosy home comforts and high property prices.

Fanning out from the capital are the Home Counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Surrey. Though known as the capital's wealthy and well-spoken commuter belt, there's more to them than suits and boots (of the Wellington variety). Sleepy villages, pretty market towns, stunning natural vistas and stately homes pepper the landscape. The whole area is accessible by day trip from London, so you can pop in and out for some respite from city life. That's exactly what the Queen does, spending private weekends at her castellated pad at Windsor Castle.

The southeast coast meanwhile was once the nation's front line of defence, bolstered by formidable cliffs, castles and fortified ports. But like a veteran soldier, it's now fonder of its own age-old tales and mellow ales than maintaining its vigil. The counties of Essex, Kent, East and West Sussex and Hampshire are enfolded in a blanket of agricultural fields and rolling chalk downs, speckled with medieval villages and ancient cathedral cities. A string of alternately tacky, nostalgic and hedonistic seaside resorts exploit the mild climate and fast links from London. In short, this is the ideal region to soak up some maritime history, dine out on seafood, and charge around beaches, battlegrounds and traditional boozers to your heart's content.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Partying the night away beside beautiful **Brighton beach** (p234)
- Following in the footsteps of pilgrims to the enchanting cathedral city of **Canterbury** (p190)
- Playing at being Queen (or King) for a day at **Windsor Castle** (p206)
- Bringing on the vertigo peering down the 150m chalk cliffs of **Beachy Head** (p233)
- Taking a turn around 2000 years of history in **St Albans** (p185)
- Clambering aboard mighty warships in the historic naval dockyard of **Portsmouth** (p214)



- POPULATION: 9.3 MILLION
- AREA: 9784 SQ MILES

Information

Kent Tourism (www.kenttourism.co.uk)
Tourism South East (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) The official website for south and southeast England.
Visit Bedfordshire & Luton (www.visitbeds-luton.com)
Visit Hampshire (www.visit-hampshire.org.uk)
Visit Surrey (www.visitsurrey.com)
Visit Sussex (www.visitsussex.org)

Activities

The southeast of England may be Britain's most densely populated corner, but there are still plenty of off-the-beaten-track walking and cycling routes to enjoy here. We concentrate on the highlights here, but you'll find more information throughout the chapter and in the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83). Regional tourist offices are also well stocked with leaflets, maps and guides to start you off walking, cycling, paragliding, sailing and more.

CYCLING

Finding quiet roads for cycle touring takes a little extra perseverance in southeast England, but the effort is richly rewarded. Long-distance burns that form part of the **National Cycle Network** (www.sustrans.org.uk) include the following:

Downs & Weald Cycle Route (150 miles) London to Brighton and on to Hastings.
Garden of England Cycle Route (165 miles) London to Dover and then Hastings.

You'll also find less-demanding routes on its website. Meanwhile there are plenty of uppers and downers to challenge mountain bikers on the **South Downs Way National Trail** (100 miles), which takes hard nuts two days but mere mortals around four. A great spot for gentler off-roading is the New Forest, which has a vast network of tracks and numerous rental shops.

WALKING

There may not be mountains in southeast England, but there are still beautiful rolling landscapes through which to ramble. Several long-distance trails meander steadily through the region, but there are plenty of shorter ambles to suit your schedule, stamina and scenery wishlist.

North Downs Way (153 miles) This popular walk begins near Farnham in Surrey but one of its most beautiful sections runs from near Ashford to Dover in Kent, and there's also a loop that takes in Canterbury near its end. The Box Hill and Devil's Punchbowl offer eye-watering views, sloping grasslands and romantic wooded areas.
Ridgeway (87 miles) From a starting point near Avebury Stone Circle in Wiltshire, this route runs to Ivinghoe Beacon near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire.
South Downs Way (100 miles) The rolling chalk South Downs are hotly tipped to become England's newest national park during the lifecycle of this book, and this trail is a beautiful roller-coaster walk along prehistoric droveways between the ancient capital of Winchester and seaside resort of Eastbourne.
Thames Path (184 miles) This one winds along the River Thames from its source in the Cotswolds (p343) right to the Thames Barrier in London. Before it reaches the capital, it skirts Windsor in Berkshire.

All these long-distance routes have sections ideal for shorter walks. History buffs will revel in the 1066 Country Walk (see p230), which connects with the South Downs Way. England's newest national park – at least for the moment – the New Forest is also popular walking country. And the Isle of Wight (see p222) is crisscrossed by paths and has some fine coastal stretches to explore on foot.

Getting There & Around

Regular trains and buses chunter in and out of London in this region but it's less easy to move sideways through the area using public transport. Renting a car is ideal for touring, but beware the rush hours of 6am to 9.30am and 4pm to 7pm when commuters can snarl the traffic to a snail's pace. Contact **National Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk) for information on public transport in the area.

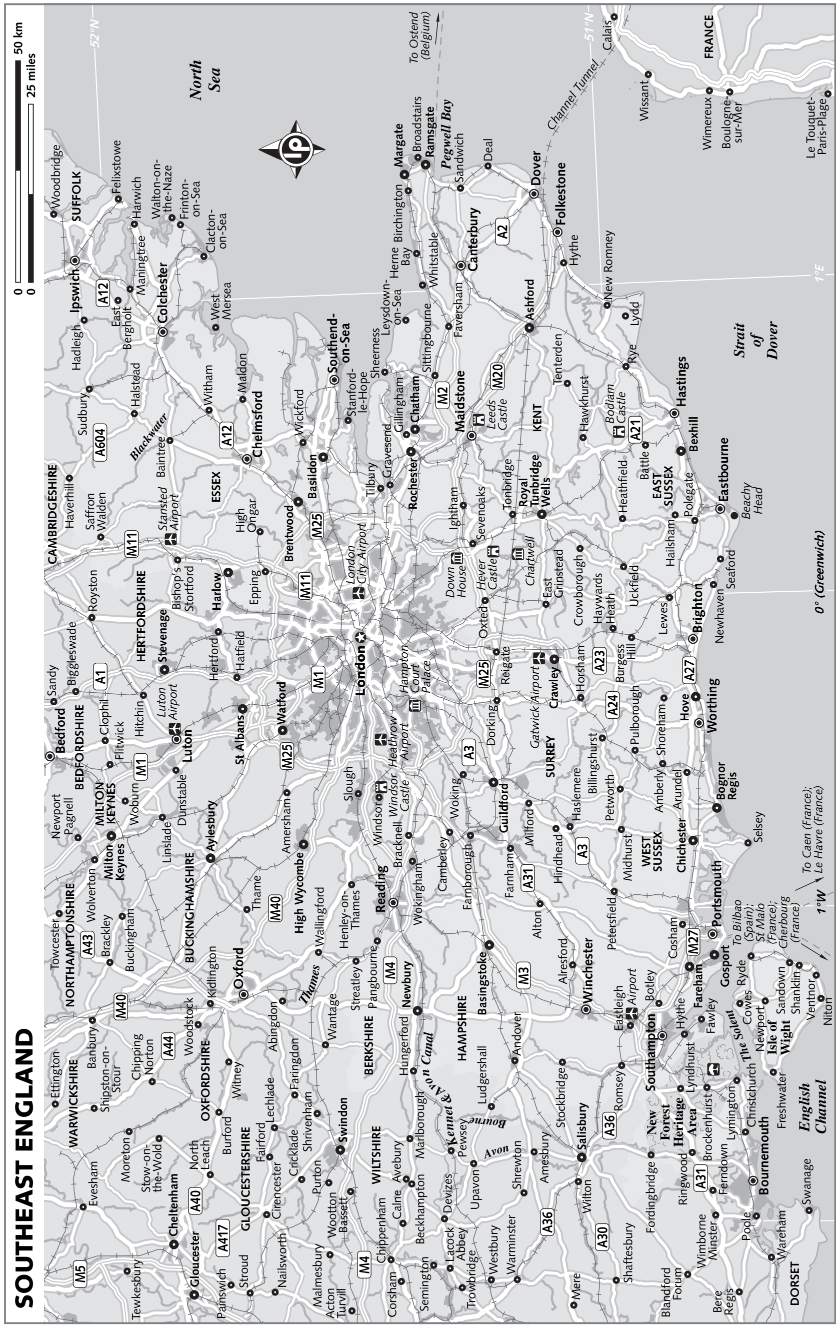
BUS

Explorer tickets (adult/child £6.80/5.30) provide day-long unlimited travel on most buses throughout the region; buy them at bus stations or on your first bus.

First Group (www.firstgroup.com) offers a FirstDay Essex pass for a day's unlimited bus travel on its county services. It costs adult/child/family £6/4.40/12. It operates a similar service in Hampshire for £4.40/3.35/10. There's also a FirstWeek pass available in both counties for £28 or £16.50 respectively.

Stagecoach Coastline (www.stagecoachbus.com) serves the coastline, East Kent and East Sussex areas. Travellers can buy an unlimited day (£5.50) or week (£20) Solent Travel Card (www.solent-travelcard.org.uk), good on major bus lines along the Hampshire coast.

Arriva (☎ 0870 120 1088) also offers a variety of day, weekly and monthly passes.


SOUTHEAST ENGLAND
0 50 km
0 25 miles
North Sea
To Ostend (Belgium)
Pegwell Bay
Channel Tunnel
FRANCE
Calais
Wissant
Wimereux
Boulogne-sur-Mer
Le Touquet-Paris-Plage
Strait of Dover
English Channel
To Caen (France); Le Havre (France)
To Bilbao (Spain); St Malo (France); Cherbourg (France)
0° (Greenwich)
1°E
1°W
51°N
52°N
SUFFOLK
ESSEX
KENT
EAST SUSSEX
WEST SUSSEX
SURREY
HAMPSHIRE
BERKSHIRE
WILTSHIRE
DORSET
OXFORDSHIRE
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
WARWICKSHIRE
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
BEDFORDSHIRE
HERTFORDSHIRE
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
MILTON KEYNES
Isle of Wight
New Forest Heritage Area
The Solent
Thames
Blackwater
Kennet & Avon Canal
Avon
Bourne
London
London City Airport
Heathrow Airport
Gatwick Airport
Stansted Airport
Luton Airport
Southampton Airport
Woodbridge
Felixstowe
Harwich
Ipswich
Walton-on-the-Naze
Frinton-on-Sea
Clacton-on-Sea
Manningtree
Colchester
East Bergholt
Hadleigh
Sudbury
Halstead
West Mersea
Witham
Maldon
Braintree
Haverhill
Saffron Walden
Chelmsford
Southend-on-Sea
Wickford
Basildon
Stanford-le-Hope
Brentwood
High Ongar
Harlow
Epping
Bishop's Stortford
Royston
Tilbury
Gravesend
Sheerness
Leysdown-on-Sea
Gillingham
Chatham
Rochester
Herne Bay
Birchington
Margate
Broadstairs
Ramsgate
Sandwich
Deal
Whitstable
Canterbury
Dover
Folkestone
Hythe
New Romney
Lydd
Rye
Faversham
Sittingbourne
Maidstone
Leeds Castle
Ashford
Tenterden
Hawkhurst
Bodiam Castle
Ightham
Sevenoaks
Tonbridge
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Hever Castle
Down House
Chartwell
East Grinstead
Oxted
Crowborough
Heathfield
Battle
Hastings
Bexhill
Eastbourne
Beachy Head
Hailsham
Polegate
Seaford
Newhaven
Lewes
Brighton
Hove
Uckfield
Haywards Heath
Burgess Hill
Crawley
Horsham
Reigate
Dorking
Hampton Court Palace
Windsor Castle
Worthing
Shoreham
Pulborough
Billingshurst
Amberley
Arundel
Bognor Regis
Chichester
Selsey
Petworth
Midhurst
Haslemere
Guildford
Woking
Milford
Hindhead
Farnham
Farnborough
Camberley
Wokingham
Bracknell
Windsor
Slough
Reading
Henley-on-Thames
Wallingford
High Wycombe
Amersham
Watford
St Albans
Hatfield
Hertford
Stevenage
Hitchin
Luton
Dunstable
Biggleswade
Sandy
Bedford
Clophill
Flitwick
Woburn
Milton Keynes
Newport Pagnell
Linslade
Aylesbury
Thame
Wolverton
Towcester
Brackley
Buckingham
Banbury
Bicester
Kidlington
Oxford
Woodstock
Witney
Burford
Abingdon
Wantage
Streatley
Pangbourne
Newbury
Hungerford
Faringdon
Lechlade
Fairford
Shrivenham
Swindon
Cricklade
Cirencester
Purton
Wootton Bassett
Malmesbury
Chippenham
Calne
Avebury
Marlborough
Pewsey
Devizes
Beckhampton
Lacock Abbey
Corsham
Semington
Trowbridge
Westbury
Warminster
Upavon
Shrewton
Amesbury
Ludgershall
Andover
Stockbridge
Basingstoke
Alton
Alresford
Winchester
Petersfield
Salisbury
Wilton
Romsey
Eastleigh
Botley
Southampton
Hythe
Fawley
Lyndhurst
Brockenhurst
Lymington
Ringwood
Fordingbridge
Ferndown
Christchurch
Bournemouth
Poole
Wimborne Minster
Wareham
Swanage
Blandford Forum
Bere Regis
Shaftesbury
Mere
Fareham
Gosport
Portsmouth
Cosham
Cowes
Ryde
Newport
Sandown
Shanklin
Ventnor
Niton
Freshwater
Evesham
Cheltenham
Gloucester
Tewkesbury
Painswick
Stroud
Nailsworth
Tetbury
Moreton
Stow-on-the-Wold
Chipping Norton
Shipston-on-Stour
Ettington
North Leach
Acton Turvill
M1
M11
M25
M20
M2
M4
M3
M27
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M5
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A417
A43
A44

TRAIN

If you're based in London but day-tripping around the southeast, the BritRail London Plus Pass allows unlimited regional rail travel for two days in eight (£70), four days in eight (£132), or seven days in fifteen (£176) and must be purchased outside the UK; see p973 for more details.

You can secure 33% discounts on most rail fares over £10 throughout the southeast of England by purchasing a **Network Railcard** (☎ 08457 48 49 50 for the phone number of your nearest station; www.railcard.co.uk/network/network.htm; per yr £20). Children under 15 can save 60%, but a minimum £1 fare applies. There are some restrictions on usage (see website for details), and you can't travel before 10am Monday to Friday.

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

Sometimes a hotel just isn't as convenient or relaxing as a self-catering cottage. Try these websites as a starting point:

Best of Brighton & Sussex Cottages (www.bestofbrighton.co.uk)

Garden of England Cottages (www.gardenofenglandcottages.co.uk)

Kent Holiday Cottages (www.kentholidaycottages.co.uk)

If these fail to tick your boxes, visit the tourism office for the entire southeast (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) and search under Accommodation/Self Catering.

HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire is a small county of fast-disappearing though still pastoral farmland. But it's not all daisies and buttermilk here. Hertfordshire is also home to stunning St Albans, a predominantly Georgian town that dates back to Roman times, and Hatfield House, one of Britain's most important stately homes and the county's top attraction.

ST ALBANS

☎ 01727 / pop 114,710

A mere 25-minute train ride from London, St Albans is one of the most interesting and attractive spots in southeast England.

Founded as Verulamium after the Roman invasion of AD 43, St Albans was renamed in the 3rd century after a Roman soldier, Alban, lost his head (both literally and, his detractors believed, figuratively) in punishment for sheltering a Christian priest in 209. He became England's first Christian martyr, and the small city was soon a site of pilgrimage – visitors can still see the shrine in the majestic cathedral.

Other attractions include the Georgian and Tudor architectural eye-candy, the excellent Roman museum, the bustling market on Wednesday and Saturday, good shopping, even better pubs and the local love of beer (see the boxed text, p187).

Orientation & Information

St Peter's St, 10 minutes' walk west of the train station on Victoria St, is the focus of the town. East of St Peter's, St George St turns into Fishpool St, a charming lane that winds its way past old-world pubs to leafy Verulamium Park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 864511; tic@stalbans.gov.uk; Market Pl; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm every 2nd Sun of month & public holidays) is in the grand town hall in the marketplace. It has bags of literature on the town's attractions including the useful *Discover St Albans* town trail (95p) and the free *Visitors Guide*, which features a handy town map. If you like guided walks, a selection of themed options including 'Monks, Mysteries and Mischief' and the intriguing combination 'Pubs & Chapels' start from here – check times (tours are usually on Wednesday and Sunday but it varies) and buy your ticket (£2) at the tourist office.

All the major banks and ATMs are on St Peter's St, near the tourist office. The main **post office** (St Peter's St; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is also in the town centre. Internet access is free in the **library** (☎ 737333; Maltings Shopping Centre).

Paton Books (34 Holywell Hill) is a marvellous bookshop full of new and dusty old books (including hard-to-find titles) housed in an elegant 17th-century building.

There's a **laundrette** (13 Catherine St) off St Peter's St.

Sights

ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL

This magnificent **cathedral** (☎ 890200; 🕑 8am-5.45pm) started life in 793 as a Benedictine church, built by King Offa of Mercia around the tomb of St Alban. Between 1077 and 1115 the church was completely rebuilt using material from the old Roman town of Verulamium, and then in the 12th and 13th centuries Gothic extensions and decorations were added. The resulting mishmash reveals a host of interesting features, including semi-lost wall paintings, stunningly ornate ceilings (a surprise after the relatively plain nave), a 20th-century luminescent rose window unveiled by Princess Diana, the elaborate nave screen and of course the shrine of St Alban (which in many ways is less impressive than these other delights).

There are guided **tours** (🕑 11.30am & 2.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am & 2pm Sat, 2.30pm Sun) of the cathedral and there's a café in the chapterhouse. Admission is by donation.

VERULAMIUM MUSEUM & ROMAN RUINS

Arrowheads, glassware, grave goods (items the dead take to the afterlife), interactive and audiovisual displays and re-created rooms make this **museum** (☎ 751810; St Michael's St; adult/child £3.30/2; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Sun) a fantastic exposé of everyday life under the Romans. Most impressive is the Mosaic Room, where five outstanding floors, uncovered between 1930 and 1955, are laid out. Tickets allow you a return visit on the same day.

Adjacent **Verulamium Park** has remains of a basilica, bathhouse and parts of the city wall. A mobile-phone tour (£2; ask at the museum) will guide you by text message (don't forget to look up in case you bump into a ruin).

Across the busy A4147 are the grassy foundations of a **Roman theatre** (☎ 835035; adult/child £2/1; 🕑 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb).

MUSEUM OF ST ALBANS

For an uncomplicated history of St Albans, this **museum** (☎ 819340; Hatfield Rd; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) does a good job. Exhibits include tools used between 1700 and 1950 by English tradespeople, and artefacts dug up by archaeologists in the city.

CLOCK TOWER

The only medieval belfry in England stands on High St. It was built around 1410 and 'Gabriel' (the original bell) is still there. Take a deep breath and climb the 93 steps of the **tower** (High St; admission 30p; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Sat, Sun & Bank Holidays Apr-Oct) for great views over the town.

Sleeping

Mrs Thomas' (☎ 858939; 8 Hall Place Gardens; s/d without bathroom £25/50) This well-kept, friendly B&B has a lovely single room with balcony and a spacious double, both of which share a bathroom.

White Hart (☎ 853624; 25 Holywell Hill; s & d £40, family r £75; 🚭) A charming half-timbered hotel with exposed beams and creaky floors just a couple of minutes' walk from the centre. A full English breakfast is £5.50 extra.

our pick **St Michael's Manor** (☎ 864444; Fishpool St; s/d from £145/180) Set in 2.5 hectares of beautiful grounds complete with a lake, this traditionally decorated hotel makes a wonderful retreat on photogenic and historic Fishpool St.

Eating

St Albans has plenty of restaurants, cuisines and good pub food vying for your appetite.

Waffle House (☎ 853502; St Michael's St; mains £4.95-6.95; 🕑 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Everything in this Saxon-era low-beamed snug comes with a Belgian waffle made with organic flour. Choose from savoury delights such as ham, cheese and mushroom, or satisfy your sweet tooth with a banoffee waffle. Yummy.

Thai Rack (☎ 850055; 13 George St; mains £5-10) This peaceful and small restaurant has a meditative outdoor patio and excellent curry.

our pick **Lussmanns Eatery** (☎ 851941; Waxhouse Gate; mains £6.20-16.45) This stylish three-floored Mediterranean restaurant off High St, with oak, leather and metal décor and plenty of glass for natural light, is understandably popular with locals. Book in advance for Friday and Saturday night.

Drinking

St Albans has one of the best collections of pubs in southern England.

our pick **Ye Olde Fighting Cocks** (☎ 865830; 16 Abbey Mill Lane) Reputedly the oldest pub in England (a former manager allegedly proved a pub stood here in AD 795!), this unusual octagonal-shaped inn has oodles of charm. Oliver Cromwell spent a night here, stabling his horses in what's now the bar; underground tunnels lead to the cathedral. Drink in this historic atmosphere while you nurse your pint.

Rose & Crown (☎ 851903; 10 St Michael's St) Another St Albans favourite, this 16th-century pub with beautiful beer garden features live music on Monday at 9pm and Irish music on Thursday at 8pm.

Goat (☎ 833934; 37 Sopwell Lane) Tucked away on a residential lane, this delightful pub is a warren of little rooms including library and games room with Chesterfield sofas.

ST ALBANS BEER FESTIVAL

Beer means business in Britain, and to prove it the South Hertfordshire branch of Campaign for Real Ale (Camra) puts on a four-day festival at the end of September to celebrate the sanctity of good beer and its key role in the national culture. There are many beer festivals in Britain worth checking out, and this one is no exception. Close to 5000 people converge on the Alban Arena off St Peter's St to sample and talk about hundreds of real ales from Britain and overseas. (For more information on real ales, see p105.) There's food available, and on Friday and Saturday evenings there's music to keep everyone entertained. Depending on the day you go, tickets range from £2 to £3, which is a bit of a bargain. For more information see www.stalbansbeerfestival.info or www.hertsale.org.uk.

Also recommended:

Black Lion Inn (☎ 851786; 198 Fishpool St) Roman malting ovens were found here. Probably the least atmospheric of all St Albans pubs.

Lower Red Lion Freehouse (☎ 855669; 36 Fishpool St) Has regular beer festivals. A little rough around the edges, but there's a charming outdoor beer garden.

Six Bells (☎ 856945; 16-18 St Michael's St) Next door to the Rose & Crown, this popular, low-ceilinged spot has a cosy fireplace and good pub food.

Getting There & Away

Rail is the most direct way to get to St Albans, although if you are coming from Heathrow you can catch Green Line bus 724, which leaves hourly and takes an hour. St Albans station is on Victoria St, a 10-minute walk east of St Peter's St. Thameslink trains depart every 15 minutes from London King's Cross to St Albans station (£7.80, 23 minutes).

AROUND ST ALBANS

Hatfield House

England's most magnificent Jacobean mansion, **Hatfield House** (☎ 01707-287010; adult/child £8/4, park only £2; 🕑 noon-4pm Wed-Sun & public holidays, gardens 11am-5.30pm Easter-Sep) was built between 1607 and 1611 for Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury and secretary of state to both Elizabeth I and James I.

Inside, you'll find a grand marble hall, famous portraits and a magnificent oak staircase decorated with carved figures, including one of John Tradescant, the 17th-century botanist responsible for the gardens.

Four-course Elizabethan banquets, complete with minstrels and court jesters, are held in the great hall on Friday nights for around £40. Book on ☎ 01707-262055.

The house is opposite Hatfield train station, and there are numerous trains from London King's Cross station (£6.80, 25 minutes). Regular bus services run between St Albans and Hatfield.

Shaw's Corner

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) spent the last 44 years of his life in this attractive **Arts & Crafts house** (☎ 01438-820307; Ayot St Lawrence; adult/child £4.20/2.10; 🕑 1-5pm Wed-Sun mid-Mar–Nov) and it has been preserved pretty much as he left it. In the garden is the writing hut (which revolves to catch the sun) where he penned several works including *Pygmalion*, the play on which the film *My Fair Lady* was based and which won him an Oscar.

Bus 304 from St Albans drops you at Gustard Wood, 1.5 miles from Ayot St Lawrence.

ESSEX

Poor old Essex has been the butt of English jokes and target for snobbery for decades. Its inhabitants are ridiculed for their bottle-blonde manes, promiscuous persuasions, witless ways and loud cars. But throw the stereotypes aside and you'll discover a county filled with diversity and diversions. Here lies historic Colchester, Britain's oldest town with a burgeoning arts scene. Sleepy medieval villages hide down winding lanes and amid countryside that inspired the painter Constable. But if you'd rather skip culture and seek out Essex's saucy stereotypical soul, make a beeline to Southend-on-Sea, the most popular fun-in-the-sun resort near London.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

☎ 01702 / pop 160,257

On the doorstep of London, the seaside resort of Southend certainly has its selling points to the capital's weekenders: sandy sprawling beaches for one and an absurdly long pier for another. However, it's also one of the more gaudy and belligerent of England's summer sun-and-sea destinations, thick with lurid amusements and seedy nightclubs. But if you have a craving for ice cream, fish and chips and salty sea air, it will be well satisfied here.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 215120; www.visitsouthend.co.uk; Southend Pier, Western Esplanade; 🕐 8.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-8pm Sat & Sun Apr-May & Oct, 8.15am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-10pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 8.15am-4pm Nov-Mar) is at the entrance to the pier. Banks and shops crowd along High St.

Sights & Activities

Other than mile upon mile of tawny imported-sand and shingle **beaches**, Southend's main attraction is the world's longest **pier** (☎ 215620; www.southendpier.co.uk; admission Apr-Sep/Oct-Mar £2.50/50p; ☎ 8am-10pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), built in 1830. At a staggering 1.33 miles long it's an impressive edifice and a magnet for boat crashes, storms and fires, the last of which ravaged its tip in 2005. The surprisingly peaceful stroll to its tip will help burn off those rock-candy calories, and a wheezy Pier Railway (included in admission price) can save you the long slog back.

Afterwards, dip beneath the pier's entrance to explore an old 'toasts-rack' pier train and antique slot machines at the **museum** (☎ 611214; adult/under 12yr 60p/free; 🕐 11am-5pm Tue-Wed, Sat & Sun May-Oct).

Kids can come nose to nose with sharks in glass tunnels and meet celebrity sea horses while parents grit their teeth at the saccharine seaside soundtrack in the good little **Sealife Adventure** (☎ 442211; www.sealifeadventure.co.uk; Eastern Esplanade; adult/child £6/4.50; 🕐 10am-7pm) aquarium, half a mile east of the pier.

Or you can embrace Southend's tacky seaside soul, inhale Rossi's velvety ice cream, rock candy or candy floss before jumping on head-spinning rides or ramming each other in dodgems at lurid amusement park **Adventure Island** (☎ 443400; www.adventureisland.co.uk; Western Esplanade; 🕐 daily Apr-Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Mar), beside the pier.

Sleeping & Eating

Gleneagles Hotel (☎ 333635; www.thegleneagleshotel.co.uk; 5 Clifftown Pde; s/d/ste £32.50/55/80; ☒) A handsome mid-19th-century terraced building facing out into the estuary, Gleneagles has many of its Victorian features intact. It also has crisply maintained rooms with period style and thoughtful extras, an extra-special suite with panoramic windows and cute little patio café.

WORTH THE TRIP

A Cistercian abbey before Henry VIII got dissolving and gave it to the earl of Bedford, **Woburn Abbey** (☎ 01525-290333; www.woburnabbey.co.uk; adult/child £10.50/6; 🕐 11am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) is a wonderful stately home set in a deer park and stuffed with mainly 18th-century furniture, porcelain, silver and paintings. Highlights include Queen Victoria's bedroom where she slept with Prince Albert in a marvellous bed fit for – well – a queen; the beautiful wall hangings and cabinets of the Chinese Room; the inspiring and ultimately mysterious story of the Flying Duchess; the design of the Long Gallery, perfect for perambulating; and the dining room adorned with a collection of Canaletto paintings commissioned by the fourth duke of Bedford and enjoyed by the current duke (the 15th) when the family entertains.

Just a giraffe's neck away is **Woburn Safari Park** (☎ 01525-290407; www.woburnsafari.co.uk; adult/child £15/11; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb), the country's largest drive-through animal reserve. Your car will skirt rhinos, tigers, lions, zebras, bison, elephants, giraffes and a host of other animals you'd never expect to see so close up in Bedfordshire. Don't be surprised if a monkey climbs all over your car (no convertibles allowed) and chews your wing mirror. There's also a 'foot safari' area with sea lions, penguins, and lemurs, plus adventure playgrounds, a restaurant and a bouncy funland for toddlers. Feeding times and demonstrations are scattered throughout the day.

If you visit the safari park first you'll be given a 50%-off voucher for the abbey and vice versa.

Although the abbey and safari park are easily accessible by car off the M1 motorway, trains from King's Cross with Thameslink only run to Flitwick, leaving you to take a taxi for the last 5 miles. If you have time, pop into the very pretty village of Woburn after your visit.

Fleur de Provence (☎ 352987; www.fleurdeprovence.co.uk; 54 Alexandra St; mains £16-18, set meal £15; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) For a glimpse of Southend's sophisticated side head away from the seafront to this chic Continental restaurant behind a frosted-glass façade, with pastel blush walls, blonde-wood floors and romantic ambience.

Getting There & Around

The easiest way to arrive is by train. There are several services each hour from London Liverpool St to Southend Victoria station or from London Fenchurch St to Southend Central station (£10.90, 55 minutes). The seafront is a 10- to 15-minute walk from either train station. For taxis, try **Southend Radio Cars** (☎ 345678).

COLCHESTER

☎ 01206 / pop 104,390

An easy day or weekend foray from London, Colchester is a charming place with a likable easygoing feel and a history that's hard to beat. It claims the title as Britain's oldest recorded city, with settlement noted here as early as the 5th century BC. Centuries later in AD 43, the Romans came, saw, conquered and constructed their northern capital Camulodunum here. So too, the invading Normans, who saw Colchester's potential and built a monstrous war machine of a castle on Roman foundations. But it's not all bygones and battlements here. By the end of 2007, Colchester will also be home to a spectacular new horseshoe-shaped gallery, Firstsite.

Orientation & Information

There are two train stations, but most services stop at North station, about half a mile north of the centre. The current bus station is off Queen St near the tourist office, but by 2010 will move to a new location on Vineyard St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 282920; www.visitcolchester.com; 1 Queen St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is opposite the castle. **Pulse** (☎ 570577; Centurion House, St John's St; per hr £2; 🕐 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun) has internet access. There are a couple of post offices on North Hill and Longe Wyre St, while banks with ATMs can be found on High St.

Sights & Activities

England's largest surviving Norman keep, bigger even than that of the Tower of London and once a hair-raising symbol of foreign invasion, now slumbers innocently amid a sweet-smelling park across from the tourist office. **Colchester Castle** (☎ 282939; www.colchestermuseums.org.uk; adult/child £4.90/3.10; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) was begun in 1076, building upon the foundations of a Roman fort. The interactive castle museum is exceptional, with plenty of try-on togas and sound effects to keep young curiosity alive. There are also illuminating guided tours (adult/child £1.90/1) of the Roman vaults, Norman rooftop chapel and castle walls.

Tymperleys, a magnificent timber-framed 15th-century building 100m east of the castle just off High St, also houses the hypnotic **Clock Museum** (☎ 282939; admission free; 🕐 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct), which echoes to the steady ticktocking of one of the largest clock collections in Britain.

Sidestep the town's lacklustre natural-history museum in favour of the world-class naturalistic enclosures of **Colchester Zoo** (☎ 331292; www.colchester-zoo.co.uk; Maldon Rd, Stanway; adult/child £13.50/7.50; 🕐 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9.30am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-dusk Oct-Mar), 5 miles northeast of the castle, where you can get hands-on with elephants and giraffes, and watch sea lions pirouette from underwater tunnels. Eastern National bus 75 stops at the zoo.

Tours

The tourist office has a variety of themed, guided **walking tours** (adult/child £3/2; 🕐 Apr-Oct) of the town at 11.30am on weekends, and on Monday in July and August. Visit www.colchesterwhatson.co.uk or call ahead for details. The tourist office also sells tickets for **City Sightseeing** (www.citysightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/3; 🕐 Apr-Sep) open-top bus tours.

Sleeping

Old Manse (☎ 545154; www.doveuk.com/oldmanse; 15 Roman Rd; s/d incl breakfast £35/60; ☒) A lovely Victorian home with a chunk of Roman wall in its garden, Old Manse is only a few minutes' walk from the centre and is a run by a motherly hostess. Its three rooms are tastefully done and breakfast is a sociable communal affair.

Red Lion (☎ 577986; www.corushotels.com; High St; s/d from £75/85; 🅿 wi-fi) This show-stealing oak-timbered hotel built in 1465 and overhanging High St doesn't disappoint inside either, especially not in the high-beamed banqueting hall where guests can enjoy traditional

English fare. A few of the shipshape rooms also boast exposed oak beams and wattle-and-daub walls.

Rose & Crown Hotel (☎ 866677; www.rose-and-crown.com; East St; s/d from £90/100; P ☒ 💻) This endearingly lopsided 14th-century posting inn, with leaded windows, overhang and exposed timber frame, is the oldest hotel in town, but features a showroom-perfect modern wing. Its bar is the most atmospheric in Colchester, and its restaurant is renowned for its fusion of French and Indian flavours.

Eating

Garden Café @ the Minories Art Gallery (☎ 500169; 74 High St; mains £4-6; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) An eccentric little neo-Gothic folly graces the sprawling garden behind this artsy café, housed in a town house art gallery of big repute. It dishes up generous daily specials until 3pm.

Lemon Tree (☎ 767337; 48 St John's St; mains £9-13.50; 🕒 10.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) This zesty little eatery is graced by a knobbly Roman wall and cavern in the corner and creative British and Continental cuisine on the menu. Décor strikes a nice chic-to-rustic balance and there are tasty blackboard specials, frequent gourmet nights and occasional live jazz.

Getting There & Around

Colchester is 62 miles from London. There are three daily National Express buses from London Victoria (£9.80, 2½ hours) and rail services every 15 to 20 minutes from London Liverpool St (£18.70, 55 minutes). For a cab, call **A1 Taxis** (☎ 544744).

KENT

Sitting demurely in London's backyard, Kent is justly described as the garden of England. This neatly manicured landscape of lush farmland, cultivated country estates, fruitful orchards, and carefully nurtured tourist attractions seems to mirror its own glorious public gardens on a grand scale. It's also the beer garden of England, producing the world-renowned Kent hops and some of the country's finest ales. Here too are long coastal stretches dotted with old-fashioned beach resorts, spellbinding Canterbury crowned by its fascinating cathedral, and the port of Dover, which is close enough to France to smell the garlic or hop over on a day trip to taste it.

OAST HOUSES

While travelling through Kent you're bound to spy the jaunty conical tips of the county's distinctive oast houses peeking out from amid the trees. These giant kilns were used for drying hops, a key ingredient in beer, which was introduced to the region in the early 15th century. The odd cone-shaped roof was necessary to create a draught for the kiln fire, and the crooked nozzles sticking out from their tops could be moved to regulate the airflow to the fire.

CANTERBURY

☎ 01227 / pop 43,552

With history along every lane, an old alehouse on every corner and a captivating World Heritage–listed cathedral plump in its heart, Canterbury is one of southern England's top attractions. Its narrow medieval alleyways and precarious timber-beamed buildings are a joy to explore, as are its riverside gardens and ancient city walls. Yet Canterbury is no mere showpiece to times past, but a spirited and lively place with a large student contingent and a wide choice of contemporary bars, restaurants and arts. But book ahead for the best hotels and eateries: pilgrims may no longer flock here in their thousands but there's a year-round flood of tourists to replace them.

History

Canterbury's past is as rich as it comes. From AD 200 there was a Roman town here, which later became the capital of the Saxon kingdom of Kent. When St Augustine arrived in England in 597 to carry the Christian message to the pagan hordes, he chose Canterbury as his *cathedra* (primary see) and set about building an abbey on the outskirts of town. Following the martyrdom of Thomas Becket (see the boxed text, opposite), Canterbury became northern Europe's most important centre of pilgrimage, which in turn led to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* one of the most outstanding poetic works in English literature (see p193).

Blasphemous murders and rampant tourism aside, Canterbury remains the primary see for the Church of England.

Orientation

Canterbury's Old Town is enclosed by a bulky medieval city wall that itself makes a wonderful walk. The Unesco World Heritage Site encompasses the cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church. Much of the centre is pedestrianised, but there is parking inside the wall.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Chaucer Bookshop (☎ 453912; 6-7 Beer Cart Lane) Antiquarian and used books.

Waterstone's (☎ 456343; 20-21 St Margaret's St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Dotcafe (☎ 478778; 19-21 St Dunstan's St; per hr £3; 🕒 10am-7pm) Large cybercafé near the train station.

Main library (☎ 463608; 18 High St; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Free internet access in the same building as the Royal Museum & Art Gallery.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Canterbury Health Centre (☎ 452444; 26 Old Dover Rd) For general medical consultations.

Kent & Canterbury Hospital (☎ 766877; Etherbert Rd) Has an emergency room and is a mile from the centre.

MONEY

ATMs and other major banks are on High St, near the corner of St Margaret's St.

Lloyd's TSB (28 St Margaret's St) Has a bureau de change.

LAUNDRY

Canterbury Laundrette (☎ 452211; Nunnery Fields; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, to 3pm Sun)

POST

Post office (29 High St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST OFFICES

Tourist office (☎ 378100; www.canterbury.co.uk; 12 Sun St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) Situated opposite the cathedral gate; staff can help book accommodation, excursions and theatre tickets.

Sights

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

It's hard to imagine a more imposing mother church for Anglicanism than this majestic early Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; adult/concession £5/4; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat May-Aug, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Apr, plus 12.30-2.30pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun year-round), the centrepiece of the city's World Heritage Site and repository of more than 1400 years of Christian history.

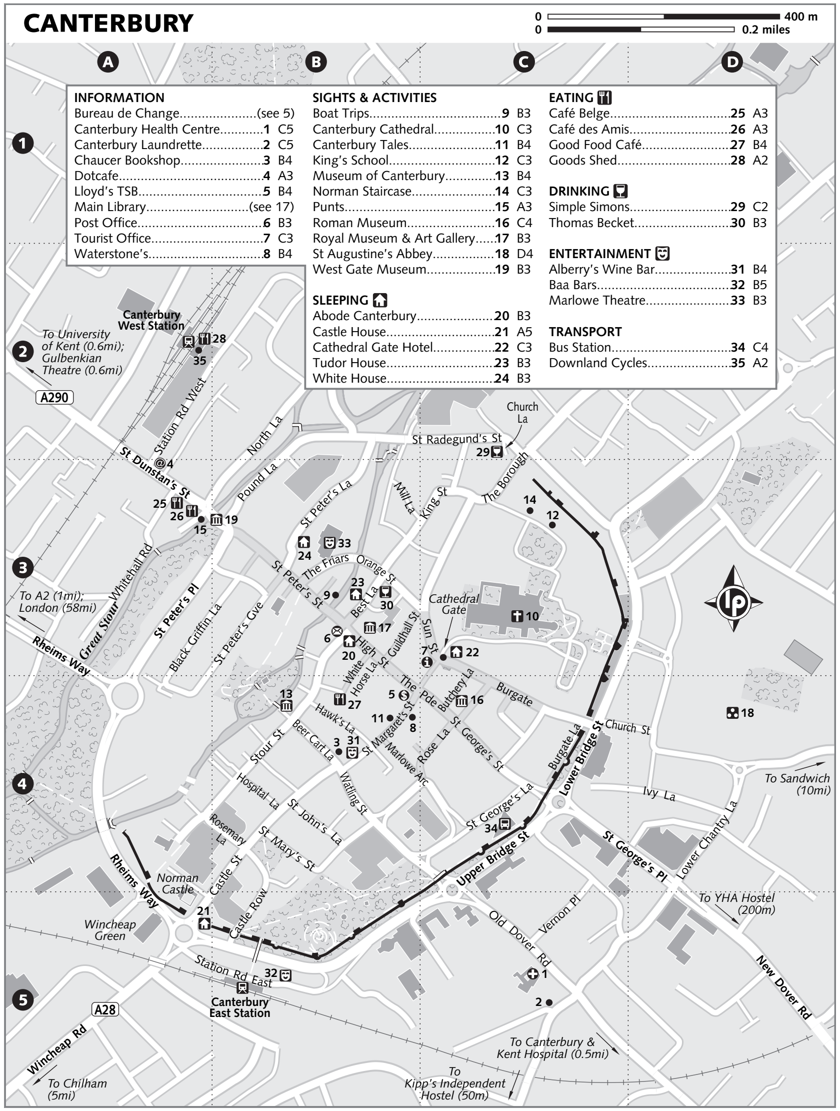
It's an overwhelming edifice filled with enthralling stories, striking architecture and a very real and enduring sense of spirituality, though visitors can't help but pick up on the ominous undertones of violence and bloodshed that whisper from its walls.

This great antique war machine is chock-a-block with monuments commemorating the nation's battles. Also here is the grave and heraldic tunic of one of the nation's most famous warmongers, Edward the Black Prince (1330–76). And of course, it was here that saintly Archbishop Thomas Becket met his grisly end at the altar (see the boxed text, below). You'll find the very spot that has drawn pilgrims for more than 800 years in the northwest transept, marked by a lit candle and striking modern altar.

The doorway to the crypt is beside the altar. This cavernous space is the cathedral's highlight, an entrancing 11th-century survivor from the cathedral's last devastating fire in 1174, which destroyed the rest of the building. Look for original carvings among the forest of pillars.

KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSE…

In 1162 King Henry II did what every good monarch should do. He appointed his good mate Thomas Becket to the highest clerical office in the land in the hope that a friendly archbishop could force the increasingly vocal religious lobby to toe the royal line. But Henry didn't count on Thomas taking his job as seriously as he did, and by 1170 Henry had become exasperated with his former favourite's penchant for disagreeing with virtually everything the king said or did. He sulked and raged for a while, then late in the year 'suggested' to four of his knights that Thomas was a little too much to bear. The dirty deed was done on 29 December. Becket's martyrdom – and canonisation in double-quick time (1173) – catapulted the cathedral to the top spot in northern Europe's top 10 pilgrimage sites. Mindful of the growing opprobrium at his role in Becket's murder, Henry arrived here in 1174 for a dramatic *mea culpa,* and after allowing himself to be whipped and scolded was granted absolution.


CANTERBURY
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
INFORMATION
Bureau de Change (see 5)
Canterbury Health Centre 1 C5
Canterbury Laundrette 2 C5
Chaucer Bookshop 3 B4
Dotcafe 4 A3
Lloyd's TSB 5 B4
Main Library (see 17)
Post Office 6 B3
Tourist Office 7 C3
Waterstone's 8 B4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
Boat Trips 9 B3
Canterbury Cathedral 10 C3
Canterbury Tales 11 B4
King's School 12 C3
Museum of Canterbury 13 B4
Norman Staircase 14 C3
Punts 15 A3
Roman Museum 16 C4
Royal Museum & Art Gallery 17 B3
St Augustine's Abbey 18 D4
West Gate Museum 19 B3
SLEEPING
Abode Canterbury 20 B3
Castle House 21 A5
Cathedral Gate Hotel 22 C3
Tudor House 23 B3
White House 24 B3
EATING
Café Belge 25 A3
Café des Amis 26 A3
Good Food Café 27 B4
Goods Shed 28 A2
DRINKING
Simple Simons 29 C2
Thomas Becket 30 B3
ENTERTAINMENT
Alberry's Wine Bar 31 B4
Baa Bars 32 B5
Marlowe Theatre 33 B3
TRANSPORT
Bus Station 34 C4
Downland Cycles 35 A2
Canterbury West Station
To University of Kent (0.6mi); Gulbenkian Theatre (0.6mi)
A290
Station Rd West
St Dunstan's St
North La
Pound La
St Peter's La
Mill La
King St
St Radegund's St
Church La
The Borough
To A2 (1mi); London (58mi)
Rheims Way
Great Stour
Whitehall Rd
St Peter's Pl
Black Griffin La
St Peter's Gve
The Friars
Orange St
Best La
St Peter's St
High St
Guildhall St
Sun St
Cathedral Gate
White Horse La
The Pde
Butchery La
Burgate
Church St
Hawk's La
Beer Cart La
St Margaret's St
Marlowe Arc
Rose La
St George's St
Burgate La
Lower Bridge St
Stour St
Hospital La
St John's La
Watling St
Rosemary La
St Mary's St
St George's La
Ivy La
To Sandwich (10mi)
Norman Castle
Castle St
Castle Row
Upper Bridge St
St George's Pl
Lower Chantry La
To YHA Hostel (200m)
Wincheap Green
Station Rd East
Canterbury East Station
A28
Old Dover Rd
Vernon Pl
New Dover Rd
Wincheap Rd
To Chilham (5mi)
To Canterbury & Kent Hospital (0.5mi)
To Kipp's Independent Hostel (50m)

The wealth of detail in the cathedral is immense and unrelenting, so it's well worth joining a one-hour **tour** (adult/child £4/2; ⏲ 10.30am, noon & 2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am, noon & 1.30pm Sat Apr-Sep, noon & 2pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar), or you can take a 30-minute self-guided **audio tour** (adult/child £2.95/1.95). There is an additional charge to take photographs.

When you leave the cathedral, go round the eastern end and turn right into **Green Court**, surrounded on the eastern side by the Deanery and on the northern side (straight ahead) by the early-14th-century Brewhouse and Bakehouse, which now house part of the very exclusive prep school, **King's School**. In the northwestern corner (far left) is the famous **Norman Staircase** (1151).

MUSEUMS

If you're in the mood for museums, the Museum Passport (adult/child £6/3.60) will grant you free admission to all the following. Individual charges are given with each listing for those without the passport.

A fine 14th-century building, once the Poor Priests' Hospital, now houses the absorbing **Museum of Canterbury** (☎ 475202; www.canterbury-museums.co.uk; Stour St; adult/child £3.30/2.20; ⏲ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Sep), which has varied exhibits from pre-Roman times to the assassination of Becket, and from Joseph Conrad to locally born celebs. The kids' room is excellent, with a memorable glimpse of real medieval poo among other amusements. There's also a fun Rupert Bear Museum (Mary Tourtel, creator of the yellow-chequered trousered bear, was born in Canterbury).

A fascinating subterranean archaeological site forms the basis of the **Roman Museum** (☎ 785575; Butchery Lane; adult/child £3/1.85; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Oct), which lets you get hands-on with artefacts and walk around reconstructed rooms. The museum culminates with the original mosaic floors, which despite dim lighting and awkward display, are impressive.

The city's only remaining medieval gateway, a brawny 14th-century bulk with murder holes pointing over the passing cars below, is home to the small **West Gate Museum** (☎ 789576; St Peter's St; adult/concession £1.20/75p; ⏲ 11am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Sat) of arms and armour. The rooftop views are worth squeezing up the spiral staircase for.

The mock-Tudor façade of the **Royal Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 452747; High St; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a splendid display of Victorian foppery, with intricate carving and big wooden gables. The interior houses mostly ho-hum art and military memorabilia, but has a few surprises from the likes of Pissarro, Henri Moore and Van Dyke.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Aiming to resurrect Geoffrey Chaucer's classic characters in all their respective smutty, bawdy, conniving and holier-than-thou technicolour, the ambitious **Canterbury Tales** (☎ 479227; www.canterburytales.org.uk; St Margaret's St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) certainly makes for an entertaining 45 minutes trailing through a series of reconstructed scenes from the book. While the jerky animatronics could never do full justice to the classic tales, it's a lively introduction for the young or uninitiated.

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

An integral but oft-overlooked part of the Canterbury World Heritage Site, **St Augustine's Abbey** (EH; ☎ 767345; adult/child £3.90/2; ⏲ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Oct-Mar) was founded in AD 597, marking the rebirth of Christianity in southern England. Later requisitioned as a royal palace, it was to fall into disrepair and now only stumpy foundations remain. A small museum and a worthwhile audio tour do their best to underline the site's importance and put flesh back on its now humble bones.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

If English literature has a father figure, then it is Geoffrey Chaucer (1342/3–1400). Chaucer was the first English writer to introduce characters – rather than 'types' – into fiction, and he did so to greatest effect in his most popular work, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Written between 1387 and his death, the *Tales* is an unfinished series of 24 vivid stories as told by a party of pilgrims on their journey from London to Canterbury and back. Chaucer successfully created the illusion that the pilgrims, not Chaucer (though he appears in the tales as himself), are telling the stories, which allowed him unprecedented freedom as an author.

Chaucer's achievement remains a high point of European literature, but it was also the first time that English came to match Latin (the language of the Church) and French (spoken by the Norman court) as a language of high literature. *The Canterbury Tales* remains one of the pillars of the literary canon, but more than that it's a collection of rollicking good yarns of adultery, debauchery, crime and edgy romance, and filled with Chaucer's witty observances of human nature. That said, contemporary modern readers tend to make more sense of modern transliterations than the often obscure original Old English version.

Tours

Canterbury Historic River Tours (☎ 07790 534744; www.canterburyrivertours.co.uk; adult/child £5.50/4; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) Will take you on a rowing-boat tour including (prebooked) candlelit tours, from behind the Old Weaver's House on St Peter's St.

Canterbury Walks (☎ 459779; www.canterbury-walks.co.uk; adult/under 12yr/senior & student £4.25/3/3.75; 🕒 2pm daily Apr-Oct, plus 11.30am Mon-Sat Jul–mid-Sep) Chaperoned walking tours; leave from the tourist office.

Ghost tours (☎ 07779 575831; adult/child £5/4) Depart from outside Alberry's wine bar in St Margaret's St at 8pm every Friday and Saturday. Only groups need book.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Kipp's Independent Hostel (☎ 786121; www.kipps-hostel.com; 40 Nunnery Fields; dm/s/d £14/18.50/32; ☒ 💻) This gabled town house impresses with its relaxed, just-like-home atmosphere with friendly folk and long-term residents, communal areas, clean though cramped dorms, bike hire, space for a few tents in the garden and an adorable pet Labrador. It's just south of the centre.

YHA Hostel (☎ 462911, canterbury@yha.org.uk; 54 New Dover Rd; dm £16.95; P ☒ 💻) Further out but worth the trip, this grand Victorian Gothic-style villa is spacious and well organised, with a grassy garden and cheaper ready-prepared tent accommodation. It's a terrific deal, and has single rooms and a bureau de change. It's 1.25 miles southeast of the centre, and open year-round by advanced booking.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Tudor House (☎ 765650; 6 Best Lane, s £25-35, d £48-55; ☒) Three overlapping storeys decorated by whitewashed shingles introduce this historic guesthouse, which sits beside the river near High St. While the interior underplays its period features, it has a cheerful and personable atmosphere, seven clean rooms with downmarket but cosy décor, sloping floors and the odd exposed beam.

Cathedral Gate Hotel (☎ 464381; cgate@cgate.demon.co.uk; 36 Burgate; s/d from £60/90, without bathroom from £35/50; ☒) Canterbury's most-photographed hotel adjoins the spectacular cathedral's gate, which it predates: a fact increasingly believable upon exploring its labyrinthine passageways where few rooms escape an angled floor, low door or wonky walls. Rooms are simple, but barring camping on the cathedral's stone porch you simply can't get a better position.

Castle House (☎ 761897; www.castlehousehotel.co.uk; 28 Castle St; s/d/f from £45/65/85; P ☒ 💻) Sitting opposite the ruins of Canterbury's Norman castle, and incorporating part of the old city walls, this tastefully decorated early-18th-century guesthouse has an amiable welcome and seven classic high-ceilinged rooms. Families are very welcome.

White House (☎ 761836; www.canterburybreaks.co.uk; 6 St Peter's Lane; s/d/f £50/70/80; ☒ 💻) This exceedingly handsome Regency town house, supposedly once home to Queen Victoria's head coachman, has a friendly welcome, nine spick-and-span rooms with delicate floral patterns, period features and a few unexpected frills like tasselled light switches and classical music over breakfast.

Abode Canterbury (☎ 766266; www.abodehotels.co.uk; 30 High St) Right in the very heart of the city on a busy shopping street opposite the striking Royal Museum & Art Gallery, Canterbury's most central top ender was set to reopen after a thorough revamp and ownership change at the time of writing. Check the website for details.

Eating

Good Food Café (☎ 456654; 1 Jewry Lane; soups £3.95, specials £6.95; 🕒 11am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) It isn't kidding. The vegetarian food at this simple but elegant café above a health-food store is more than good. Plates overflow with locally sourced, organic and biodynamically grown veggies and daily specials such as tortillas and lasagne.

Café des Amis (☎ 464390; 95 St Dunstan's St; mains £7-13; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This fun Mexican restaurant is well loved for its all-afternoon lunch, great food in enormous portions and a lively colourful atmosphere augmented by Latin music, entertaining artwork, beautiful staff and chilled margaritas.

Goods Shed (☎ 459153; Station Rd West; lunch £8-12, dinner £10-16; 🕒 market 10am-7pm Tue-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun, restaurant lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Farmers market, food hall and fabulous restaurant all rolled into one, this converted station warehouse by the railway is a hit with everyone from self-caterers to sit-down gourmets. The chunky wooden tables sit slightly above the market hubbub but in full view of its appetite-whetting stalls, and country-style daily specials exploit the freshest farm goodies available.

Café Belge (☎ 768222; 89-90 St Dunstan's St; mains £8.95-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Think Belgian mealtimes and mussels, *frites* (chips) and beer spring to mind, but this award-winning restaurant will astonish with its variety. Its '50 ways to eat a mussel' leaves diners drooling, and the list of beers tops a hundred. The cosy dining area is decorated with images of Tin Tin and pop art.

Drinking

Simple Simons (☎ 762355; 3-9 Church Lane) If you've come to Britain on a real-ale pilgrimage, this is one stop you shouldn't miss. A medley of local beers, guest ales, stouts, porters and scrumpy line the bar in this atmospheric 15th-century pub, which has a heavy-beamed ceiling, a roaring fire and a rhododendron-dotted rear garden.

Thomas Beckett (☎ 464384; 21 Best Lane) Another quintessentially English pub with a garden's worth of hops hanging from its timber frame, several quality ales to sample and a traditional décor of copper pots, comfy seating and a fireplace to cosy up to on winter nights. It also serves decent pub grub (mains £6 to £9).

Entertainment

Alberry's Wine Bar (☎ 452378; St Margaret's St) Every night is different at this hip after-hours music bar, which puts on everything from smooth live jazz to DJ-led drum and bass to commercial pop. It's a two-level place where you can relax over a French Kiss (cocktail or otherwise) above, before partying in the basement bar below.

Baa Bars (☎ 462520; 15 Station Rd East; admission £3) There are three floors of different DJs, dance floors and bars at this edgy, almost industrial-looking, nightclub beside the train station.

Marlowe Theatre (☎ 787787; www.marlowetheatre.com; The Friars) Canterbury's central venue for performing arts brings in some wonderful touring plays, dances, concerts and musicals year-round.

Gulbenkian Theatre (☎ 769075; www.kent.ac.uk/gulbenkian; University of Kent) Out on the university campus, this large long-time venue puts on plenty of contemporary plays, modern dance and great live music.

Getting There & Away

Canterbury is 58 miles from London and 15 miles from Margate and Dover.

BUS

The bus station is just within the city walls off High St. There are frequent buses to London Victoria (£11.40, two hours, hourly), and hourly services to Dover (35 minutes). Around three buses per hour run to Margate (53 minutes), and two per hour run to Broadstairs (one hour) and Ramsgate (one hour 20 minutes). Services to Whitstable leave every 15 minutes (30 minutes).

TRAIN

There are two train stations: Canterbury East (for the YHA hostel), accessible from London Victoria; and Canterbury West, accessible from London's Charing Cross, Victoria and Waterloo stations.

London-bound trains leave frequently (£18.70, 1½ hours, two to three hourly), as do Canterbury East to Dover Priory trains (£5.20, 16 to 28 minutes, every 30 minutes).

Getting Around

Canterbury's centre is mostly pedestrianised. Car parks are dotted along and just within the walls. Central parking vouchers cost from £6 to £10 for 24 hours or £1 to £1.60 per daytime hour. Day-trippers may prefer to use one of the city's three Park & Ride sites, which cost £2 per day and are connected to the centre by buses every 10 minutes from 7am to 7.30pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm Sunday.

Taxi companies include **Cathedral Cars** (☎ 451 000) and **Cabwise** (☎ 712929). **Downland Cycles** (☎ 479643; www.downlandcycles.co.uk; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) rents bikes from the London-bound platform at Canterbury West station. Bikes cost £12 per day with helmet.

WHITSTABLE

☎ 01227 / pop 30,159

Famous for its succulent oysters, which have been harvested off these warm shores since Roman times, Whitstable has an unspoilt charm far removed from other regional resorts. Still a humble fishing village at heart, its streets sport names like Squeeze Gut Alley and Skinner's Alley, and are home to a host of venerable old seafood restaurants. The shingle beach is barbed with rows of groins, but is a pretty stretch nonetheless, dotted with multicoloured beach huts and overlooked by sharp cliffs east of town. And from atop the grass-topped Tankerton Slopes you can spy the Street, a narrow shingle ridge stretching half a mile out to sea but only exposed at low tide.

The **tourist office** (☎ 275482; www.visitwhitstable.co.uk; 7 Oxford St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, to 4pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) can help you find and book accommodation, while the nearby **library** (☎ 273

309; 31-33 Oxford St; 🕑 9.30am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 1pm Wed, to 4pm Sat) can make you a temporary member to use its internet terminals.

Festivals & Events

For a week at the end of July, the town hosts a seafood, arts and music extravaganza, the **Whitstable Oyster Festival** (www.whitstableoysterfestival.co.uk), which not only gives you double the excuse to wash down juicy oysters with Guinness or champagne but offers a packed schedule of events, from the traditional 'blessing of the waters' to samba and jazz bands, oyster-eating competitions to a beer festival.

Sleeping

Alliston (☎ 779066; bobgough57@aol.com; 1 Joy Lane; s/d £40/60; 🅿 ☒) A 10-minute walk from the centre, this delightful B&B is run by a charming double act of Ernie Wise and Albert Finney lookalikes. It has just three spacious, pristine rooms with plenty of daylight, and breakfast is served looking out over the pretty garden.

Hotel Continental (☎ 280280; www.hotelcontinental.co.uk; 29 Beach Walk; s/d/huts from £55/60/100, d with sea view & balcony £100; 🅿 ☒) This elegant three-storey Art Deco building by the waterfront has cheerfully decorated if somewhat overpriced rooms as well as a row of charmingly converted fisherman's huts on the beach. Room rates increase by £35 to £45 at weekends, and in July and August.

Eating

Whitstable's famous oysters are harvested between April and September.

Wheeler's Oyster Bar (☎ 273311; 8 High St; mains £13-19; 🕑 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) This adorable little spot has served oysters since 1856, and continues to peddle the freshest catch as passionately as ever. It also has a tiny Victorian parlour, filled with seafaring gear and old photos, for a dignified sit-down meal.

Whitstable Oyster Fishery Co Restaurant (☎ 276856; www.oysterfishery.co.uk; The Horsebridge; mains £13-25; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The most famous seafood restaurant in the region sits right beside the water and serves a variety of simply cooked, fresh-from-the-nets treats from sea bass to cockles.

TOP FIVE CASTLES

- Arundel Castle (Arundel; p226)
- Dover Castle (Dover; p199)
- Hever Castle (Kent Weald; p202)
- Leeds Castle (Kent Weald; p202)
- Windsor Castle (p206)

Getting There & Away

Buses 4 and 6 go to Canterbury (30 minutes) every 15 minutes.

ISLE OF THANET

You won't need a ferry or a wetsuit to reach this island, which was swallowed by the mainland during the first millennium as the Watsun Channel dried up. It now forms a perky peninsula jutting out to sea at the far eastern tip of the country. But in its island days, Thanet was the springboard to several epoch-making episodes of English history. It was here that the Romans kicked off their invasion in the 1st century AD, and where Augustine landed in AD 597 to begin his conversion of the pagans. These days, Thanet's pretty coastline is home to a string of Victorian resorts that are only invaded by the summer bathing-suit brigade. Walkers can also look to conquer the **Thanet Coastal Path**, a 20-mile trail that hugs the shore from Margate to Pegwell Bay via Broadstairs and Ramsgate.

Margate

☎ 01843 / pop 57,000

A popular seaside resort for more than 250 years thanks to its fine-sand beaches, Margate still strives to recapture its Victorian heyday of candy-striped beach huts, donkey rides and Punch and Judy puppet shows. But these days it's more about amusements and chippies, and outside summer has the melancholy air of a town past its prime.

Visit the **tourist office** (☎ 292019; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 12-13 The Parade; 🕑 9.15am-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) for maps and information.

SIGHTS

Margate's unique attraction is the mystifying subterranean **Shell Grotto** (☎ 220008; www.shellgrotto.co.uk; Grotto Hill; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕑 10am-5pm daily Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr), a snug set of passageways discovered in 1835 and plastered with several million shells arranged in symbol-rich mosaics. It has inspired feverish speculation over the years but presents few answers; some think it a 2000-year-old pagan temple, others an elaborate 19th-century hoax. Either way it's an exquisite place worth seeing.

SLEEPING & EATING

YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5956; margate@yha.org.uk; The Beachcomber, 3-4 Royal Esplanade; dm members/nonmembers £10.95/13.95; ☒) This faintly hotel-like hostel sits mere paces from a sandy Blue Flag beach and about half a mile west from the tourist office. It caters especially well to families. Book 48 hours in advance.

Walpole Bay Hotel (☎ 221703; www.walpolebayhotel.co.uk; 5th Ave, Cliftonville; s/d from £50/70; ☒) For a dose of good ol' English eccentricity look no further than this musty part-hotel, part-museum of Victorian life. The pink flouncy rooms are furnished with antiques while public spaces are filled by glass-cased displays of 19th-century memorabilia. The hotel is a mile from central Margate, in Cliftonville.

Newbys Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 292888; 1 Market St; mains £8-13; 🕑 dinner Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) In a town not blessed by good eateries, this is the best place for fine wines, country-fresh food and bubbly French atmosphere. It serves seasonal menus with good local seafood.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses to Margate leave from London Victoria (£11.50, 2½ hours, five daily). From Canterbury take bus 8 (53 minutes, three hourly).

Trains run twice hourly from London Victoria and less frequently from Charing Cross (£21.60, 1¾ hours).

Broadstairs

☎ 01843 / pop 24,370

Unlike its bigger, brasher neighbours, the pretty little resort village of Broadstairs revels in its quaintness, plays the Victorian nostalgia card at every opportunity and names every second business after the works of its most famous holidaymaker, Charles Dickens. Behind the neatly manicured gardens, the cute little orange-sand bay and its wistful Punch and Judy shows, however, is a far grittier history of smuggling and shipbuilding.

The **tourist office** (☎ 861232; Dickens House Museum, 2 Victoria Pde; 🕑 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) has details of the annual, week-long **Dickens Festival** in mid-June which culminates in a banquet-cum-ball in Victorian dress (£15). It's located in the quaint **Dickens House Museum** (☎ 861232; www.dickenshouse.co.uk; 2 Victoria Pde; adult/child £2.30/1.20; 🕑 10am-4pm Apr-Oct), actually the home of Mary Pearson Strong, inspiration for the character of Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield*. Diverse Dickensiana on display includes letters from the author.

Dickens wrote parts of *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield* in the handsome if slightly worse-for-wear clifftop house above the pier between 1837 and 1859. Now private property, it suffered severe fire damage in 2006.

SLEEPING & EATING

Victoria (☎ 871010; www.thevictoriabroadstairs.co.uk; 23 Victoria Pde; s from £52-117, d £88-129; ☒) A refined spot with service to match, this Victorian house has plentiful period style and features six spotlessly maintained bedrooms. And if that doesn't convince you, it's a mere stone's throw from the beach.

Thai Four Two (☎ 862925; 42 York St; mains £4.50-7; 🕑 6-9pm Mon-Thu, 6-11pm Fri & Sat) This restful little nook with trickling fountains, lush greenery and bamboo chairs serves wonderful home-style Thai food, most of which can be adapted for vegetarians.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Thanet Loop bus runs every 15 minutes through the day to Ramsgate (20 minutes) and Margate (20 minutes).

Buses 8 and 9 also run twice hourly to Canterbury (one hour 20 minutes) via Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. National Express buses leave High St for London Victoria (£11.50, three hours, five daily).

Trains to London Victoria (£22.50, 1¾ to 2¼ hours) leave twice hourly and there are less frequent services to London Bridge and Charing Cross. You may have to change at Ramsgate.

Ramsgate

☎ 01843 / pop 38,200

More welcoming than jaded big sis Margate and livelier than twee little neighbour Broadstairs, Ramsgate is the kind of varied and often quirky resort town that can appeal to all ages. While families and surfers splash about along the Blue Flag beach, cosmopolitan bars and easygoing street cafés line the marina and seafront promenade, and a different breed of cultural visitor is drawn to the town's rich maritime history and neo-Gothic architecture. And picturesquely sheltered below the handsomely arched harbour walls is a forest of rigging that creaks and whistles in the sea breeze.

On a small alleyway off Leopold St, the **tourist office** (☎ 583333; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 17 Albert Ct; 🕑 9.15am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) has information and a self-guided walking map of the areas smuggler's caves.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When the sun shines, Rollerbladers, coffee quaffers, surfers and sunbathers all make a beeline to Ramsgate's reddish-sand and shingle beach and pleasant promenade, to the east of the main harbour under an imposing cliff.

At least 620 hapless ships have been wrecked in the notorious Goodwin Sands off this stretch of coast, and an intriguing assortment of loot from their barnacled carcasses can be found in the **Ramsgate Maritime Museum** (☎ 290399; www.ekmt.fsnet.co.uk; Clock House, Royal Harbour; adult/child £1.50/75p; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Thu-Sun Oct-Easter), inside the town's 19th-century clocktower near the harbour. Here too is a line marking Ramsgate's own meridian (the town has its own Ramsgate Mean Time).

SLEEPING

Crescent (☎ 591419; www.ramsgate-uk.com; 19 Wellington Cres; s/d without bathroom from £25/50) This guesthouse is the prettiest building in a row of curvaceous three-storey Georgian homes on a seafront clifftop. It's run by very affable DIYers who keep its dozen rooms in good order. There are a few en-suite rooms for £10 more.

Royal Harbour Hotel (☎ 591514; www.royalharbourhotel.co.uk; Nelson Crescent; s/d from £65/85, superior r £100-215; 🚭 💻) Occupying a parallel seafront crescent to the west, this boutique hotel exudes an infectious enthusiasm. Books, paintings and newspapers lie everywhere and the 'cabins' have squeaky clean blue-and-white wood-panelled décor and postcard views over the forest of masts below.

EATING & DRINKING

Surin Restaurant (☎ 592001; www.surinrestaurant.co.uk; 30 Harbour St; mains £6-13; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Ramsgate is an unlikely spot to eat some of the best Thai, Cambodian and Lao food this side of the Hindu Kush, but sure enough, this darling little restaurant delivers. The restaurant is a dumpling's throw from the seafront and even serves its own label of microbrewed beers.

Ramsgate Brew House (☎ 594758; 98 Harbour Pde) Revelling in its own eccentricity, this part bakery, part brewery, part nuthouse on the harbour-front thumbs its nose at tradition. You're equally likely to see elderly bow-tied gents tinkering on the piano as ale-swilling holidaymakers, and civilised townfolk partaking of tea and pastries. Choose between outdoor tables or a vast sawdusty interior with ale-making paraphernalia and nude statues.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express bus 22 runs to London Victoria (£11.50, three hours, five daily) via Margate and Broadstairs. There are also local buses to Canterbury, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Trains run twice hourly to London Victoria and Charing Cross (£22.50, two hours).

There's also a ferry service to Ostend in Belgium run by **Transeuropa Ferries** (☎ 595522; www.transeuropaferries.com) from Ramsgate New Port just west of the centre (per passenger with car £39, five hours, three daily).

DOVER

☎ 01304 / pop 39,078

Dreary Dover is the kind of ugly port town that you either visit to pile on and off its cross-channel ferries to France, or else to make a dash for its premier attractions and move quickly on. That said, as attractions go it has several humdingers. The port's vital strategic position so close to the Continent gave rise to a vast and unusual hilltop castle with 2000 years of history under its belt. Also here are the spectacular white cliffs that are as much a symbol of British wartime resilience as Winston Churchill or the Battle of Britain. However, the town itself has an embattled aura, with run-down postwar architecture and often palpable tensions between asylum seekers and long-term residents.

Orientation

Dover Castle dominates the town from a high promontory east of town, above the white cliffs. Ferry departures are from the Eastern Docks southeast of the castle. Dover Priory train station is a short walk west of the centre. The bus station is on Pencester Rd.

Information

Banks and ATMs are located on Market Sq.

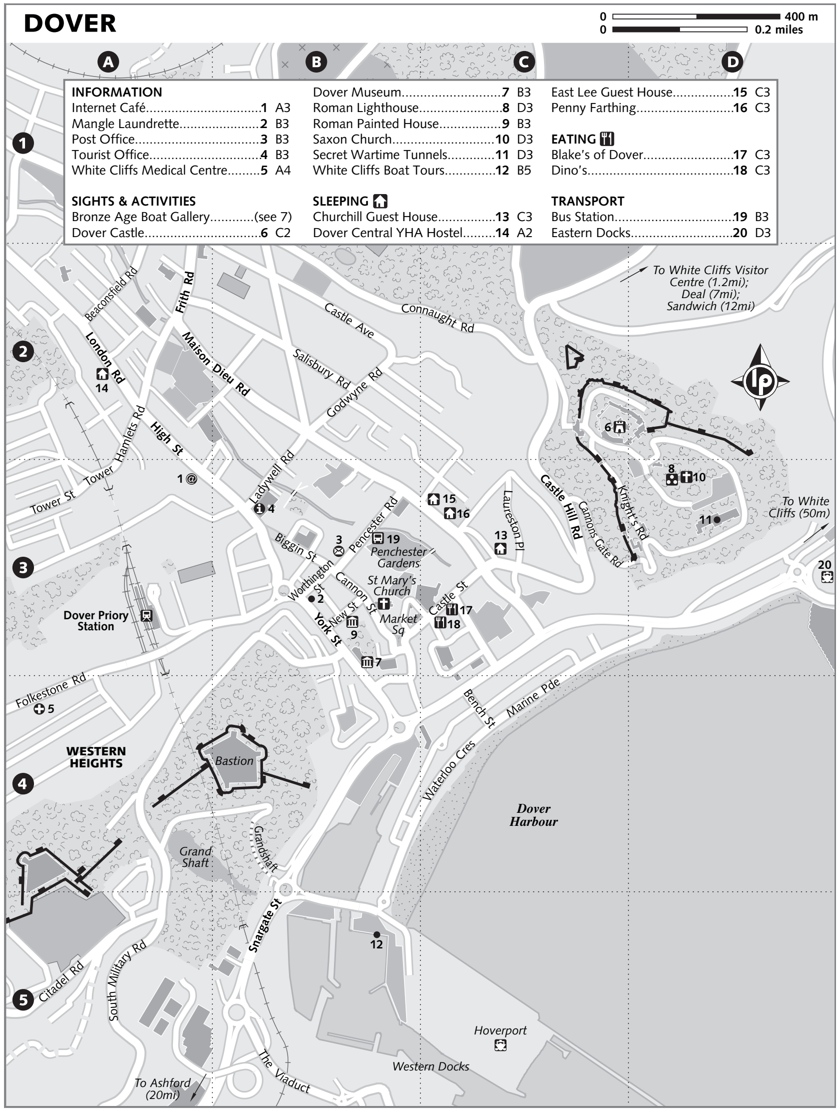
Internet Café (☎ 242474; 21 High St; per hr £3; 🕐 9am-10pm)

Mangle laundrette (Worthington St; per load £3; 🕐 8am-8pm)

Post office (Pencester Rd; 🕐 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 205108; www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk; Biggin St; 🕐 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Located in the Old Town Gaol and has accommodation- and ferry-booking services (both free).

White Cliffs Medical Centre (☎ 201705; 143 Folkestone Rd)


DOVER
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INFORMATION
Internet Café 1 A3
Mangle Laundrette 2 B3
Post Office 3 B3
Tourist Office 4 B3
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
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SLEEPING
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Dino's 18 C3
TRANSPORT
Bus Station 19 B3
Eastern Docks 20 D3
To White Cliffs Visitor Centre (1.2mi); Deal (7mi); Sandwich (12mi)
To White Cliffs (50m)
To Ashford (20mi)
Beaconsfield Rd
London Rd
Frith Rd
Maison Dieu Rd
Castle Ave
Connaught Rd
Salisbury Rd
Godwyne Rd
Tower Hamlets Rd
High St
Tower St
Ladywell Rd
Pencester Rd
Biggin St
Worthington St
Cannon St
New St
York St
Penchester Gardens
St Mary's Church
Market Sq
Castle St
Laureston Pl
Castle Hill Rd
Cannons Gate Rd
Knight's Rd
Dover Priory Station
Folkestone Rd
Bench St
Marine Pde
Waterloo Cres
WESTERN HEIGHTS
Bastion
Dover Harbour
Grand Shaft
Grandshaft
Snargate St
South Military Rd
Citadel Rd
The Viaduct
Hoverport
Western Docks

Sights & Activities

DOVER CASTLE

Top contender for England's most formidable fortress, the gargantuan **Dover Castle** (EH; ☎ 211067; adult/under 5yr/5-15yr £9.50/free/4.80; 🕐 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Jan, 10am-4pm Feb-Mar; Ⓟ) was built to bolster the country's weakest point at this, the shortest sea-crossing to the Continent. It commandeers the sprawling hilltop over the city and commands a superb view of the English Channel as far as the French coastline.

The site has been in use for as many as 2000 years. On the vast grounds are the remains of a **Roman lighthouse**, which dates from AD 50 and may be the oldest standing building in Britain. Beside it lies a restored **Saxon church**.

The robust 12th-century **keep**, with walls up to 7m thick, is filled with reconstructed scenes of Henry VIII's visit, and its base shelters a sound-and-light re-creation of a brutal 13th-century siege. However, the castle's biggest attraction is the warren of claustrophobic **secret wartime tunnels** that honeycomb the cliffside. Excellent 50-minute tours delve into the hillside passageways, which were first excavated during the Napoleonic Wars and then expanded to house a command post and hospital in WWII. They now house reconstructed scenes of their wartime use, complete with sounds, smells and erratic lighting. One of Britain's most famous wartime operations, code-named Dynamo, was directed from here in 1940. It saw the evacuation of hundreds of thousands troops from the French beaches of Dunkirk.

Buses 90c and 111 run from Dover Priory station to the castle.

ROMAN PAINTED HOUSE

Some of the most extensive if stunted Roman wall paintings north of the Alps are on show at the **Roman Painted House** (☎ 203279; New St; adult/child £2/80p; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep), although they're housed in an amateurish museum. Several scenes depict Bacchus (the god of wine and revelry), which makes perfect sense as this large villa was built around AD 200 as a *mansio* (hotel) for travellers in need of a little lubrication to unwind. Some things never change.

DOVER MUSEUM

By far the most enthralling exhibit in the three-storey **Dover Museum** (☎ 201066; www.dovermuseum.co.uk; Market Sq; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat year-round & noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep) is that of an astonishing 3600-year-old Bronze Age boat discovered here in 1992. Vaunted as the world's oldest-known seagoing vessel, it measures a thumping great 9.5m by 2.4m. Kids will love the touchy-feely activities, white coats and microscopes that accompany the exhibit.

Sleeping

B&Bs cluster along Castle St, Maison Dieu Rd and Folkestone Rd.

Dover Central YHA Hostel (☎ 201314; dover@yha.org.uk; 306 London Rd; dm incl breakfast £16.95; ☒ 💻) This dignified Georgian building, a short walk from the town centre, is a little neglected on the exterior but has a neatly maintained interior. Still, it's friendly and clean. It's often full so book ahead.

Churchill Guest House (☎ 208365; www.toastofdover.co.uk; 6 Castle Hill Rd; s/d from £35/50, winter £30/45; 🅿 ☒) A stately old-timer with modern comfort levels, this traditionally decorated, welcoming Georgian town house sits close to St Martin's and Hubert House, and has six comfortable rooms stocked with books and thoughtful extras. It does not cater to young children.

Also recommended:

Penny Farthing (☎ 205563; www.pennyfarthingdover.co.uk; 109 Maison Dieu Rd; s/d £27/44; 🅿 ☒) Grey-brick Victorian house with frilly rooms.

East Lee Guest House (☎ 210176; www.eastlee.co.uk; 108 Maison Dieu Rd; d with/without breakfast from £52/46; 🅿 ☒) Lovely terracotta-shingled town house.

Eating & Drinking

Dino's (☎ 204678; 58 Castle St; mains £7-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) More than a hundred bottles hang from the ceiling – their corks forming an arch and decorating the front desk – of this wonderfully authentic family-run Italian restaurant. What it lacks in natural light, it makes up for with delicious freshly made pasta.

Blake's of Dover (☎ 202194; www.blakesofdover.com; 52 Castle St; mains £10-18; 🕑 noon-3pm & 6-11.30pm Mon-Fri, lunch only Sat) This snug but stylish English restaurant has an intimate cellar bar with fine wines, malt whiskies and microbrewed ales, or you can stay above ground for the sophisticated wood-panelled restaurant, serving locally caught fish dishes on candlelit tables.

Getting There & Away

Dover is 75 miles from London and 15 miles from Canterbury.

BOAT

Ferries depart for France from the Eastern Docks (which are accessible by bus; see opposite) below the castle. Fares vary according to season and advance purchase. See the websites for specials.

Norfolk Line (☎ 0870 164 2114; www.norfolkline.com) Services every two hours to Dunkirk (1¾ hours).

P&O Ferries (☎ 0870 598 0333; www.poferries.com) Runs to Calais (1¼ hours) every 40 minutes to an hour.

Seafrance (☎ 0870 443 1653; www.seafrance.com) Ferries to Calais roughly every hour and a half.

SpeedFerries (☎ 0870 2200 570; www.speedferries.com) Up to five daily services to Boulogne (50 minutes).

BUS

Dover's **bus station** (Pencester Rd) is in the heart of town. Stagecoach East Kent has a Canterbury to Dover service (35 minutes, hourly). National Express runs 20 daily coaches from London Victoria (£11.50, 2¾ hours). Buses also go direct to Hastings (£6, two hours 50 minutes, hourly), Deal (45 minutes, hourly) and Sandwich (one hour, hourly).

CHANNEL TUNNEL

The Channel Tunnel begins its descent into the English Channel 9 miles west of Dover, just off the M20 between London and Dover. The nearest station foot passengers can board the **Eurostar** (☎ 08705 186186; www.eurostar.com) train is at Ashford. From Dover, it's easier if you have a car: follow signs from junction 11A for the Channel Tunnel. Crossing with your car via the **Eurotunnel** (☎ 08705 353535; www.eurotunnel.com) can cost anywhere from £49 to £199 depending on specials and how far ahead you book. For more information, see p968.

TRAIN

There are more than 40 trains daily from London Victoria and Charing Cross stations to Dover Priory via Ashford and Sevenoaks (£22.50, two hours).

Getting Around

The ferry companies run regular shuttle buses between the docks and the train station (five minutes) as they're a long walk apart.

Heritage (☎ 204420) and **Star Taxis** (☎ 228822) have 24-hour services. A one-way trip to Deal costs £12; to Sandwich it's £17.

AROUND DOVER

White Cliffs

Immortalised in song, film and literature, these iconic cliffs are more than just precipices of 100m-high white chalk extending for 10 miles on either side of Dover and visible from France. They are a part of the national psyche, acting as a big white welcome-home sign to generations of travellers and soldiers.

It is the 6-mile stretch east of town – properly known as the Langdon Cliffs – that particularly captivates visitors' imaginations. The chalk here is about 250m deep, and the cliffs themselves are about half a million years old, formed when the melting icecaps of northern Europe were gouging a channel between France and England.

The Langdon Cliffs are managed by the National Trust, which has a **visitor centre** (☎ 01304-202756; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Feb) and **car park** (nonmembers £2.50) 2 miles east of Dover.

From the visitor centre, a stony path snakes its way further east along the clifftops for a bracing 2-mile walk to the stout Victorian **South Foreland Lighthouse** (NT; ☎ 01304-202756; adult/child £3.60/1.80; 🕑 guided tours 11am-5pm Fri-Mon late Apr-Oct). This was the first lighthouse to be powered by electricity, and site of the first international radio transmissions in 1898.

The cliffs are 2 miles east of Dover along Castle Hill Rd and the A258 road to Deal or off the A2 past the Eastern Docks. Buses 113 and 90/1 from Dover stop near the main entrance.

To see them in all their full-frontal glory, **White Cliffs Boat Tours** (☎ 01303-271388; www.whitecliffsboattours.co.uk; adult/child £6/3; 🕑 daily Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) runs 40-minute water tours at 10am, noon, 2pm and 4pm from the Western Docks.

KENT WEALD

Known simply as the Weald by locals, this gently rolling stretch of Kent and East Sussex gets its name from the Old German *wald*, meaning 'forest'. But today the timber is long-since harvested and replaced by lush fields, sleepy villages and neatly trimmed gardens, including the green-fingered triumph at Sissinghurst Castle. The region also hosts a huddle of extraordinary castles and manor houses.

Chartwell

A breathtakingly intimate insight into the life of Sir Winston Churchill (see the boxed text, p55), England's famous cigar-chomping bombast, can be found at **Chartwell** (☎ 01732-868381; Westerham; adult/child £10/5, garden & studio only £5/2.50; 🕑 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug), 6 miles east of Sevenoaks; this 19th-century house was his home from 1924 until his death in 1965.

The house and its lake-speckled grounds have been preserved much as Winnie left them, and you can almost picture him pacing about his study with a furrowed brow (he would often work standing up, saying he found it easier to think). Churchill was also a prolific painter and his daubings are scattered throughout the house and fill the garden studio.

Transport options are limited without a car. Coaches run from Sevenoaks train station

(30 minutes) every two hours on Wednesday from May to mid-September. Metrobus 401 runs on Sunday only.

Hever Castle

A few miles west of Tonbridge, this too-cute-to-be-true **castle** (☎ 01732-865224; www.hevercastle.co.uk; adult/5-14yr £9.80/5.30, gardens only £7.80/5; 🕒 noon-6pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov) sits amid a narrow duck-trailed moat, in family-friendly grounds with kooky topiary of woodland creatures in its outer courtyard, and no fewer than three mazes scattered about.

The castle is famous for being the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, mistress to Henry VIII and then his doomed queen. It dates from 1270, with a Tudor house added in 1505 by the Bullen (Boleyn) family. The castle later fell into disrepair until 1903, when it was bought by the American multimillionaire William Waldorf Astor, who poured obscene amounts of money into a massive refurbishment. The exterior is unchanged from Tudor times, but the interior is thick with Edwardian panelling.

From London Victoria trains go to Hever (£7.70, 50 minutes, hourly; change at Hurst Green), a poorly signposted 1-mile walk from the castle. Alternatively, you could take a direct train from London Bridge to Edenbridge (£7.70, 37 to 50 minutes), from where it's a 4-mile taxi or bike ride.

Leeds Castle

This immense moated pile is for many the world's most romantic **castle** (☎ 01622-765400; www.leeds-castle.com; adult/4-15yr/senior & student £13.50/8/11; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Mar), and it's certainly one of the most visited in Britain. While it looks formidable enough from the outside – a hefty structure balancing on two islands amid a large lake and sprawling estate – it actually has a reputation as something of a 'ladies castle': in its more than 1000 years of history it's been home to a who's who of medieval queens, most famously Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

The castle was transformed from fortress to lavish palace over the centuries, and its last owner, the high-society hostess Lady Baillie, used it as a princely family home and party pad to invite the likes of Errol Flynn, Douglas Fairbanks and JFK.

The castle's vast estate offers enough attractions of its own to justify a day trip: there are peaceful walks, a duckery, aviary and falconry demonstrations. You'll also find a quirky dog-collar museum and a hedge maze, overseen by a grassy bank where fellow travellers can shout encouragement or misdirections.

Since Lady Baillie's death in 1974, a private trust has managed the property. This means that some parts of the castle are periodically closed for private events.

Leeds castle is just east of Maidstone. National Express runs one direct bus daily from London Victoria coach station, leaving at 9am and returning at 4.40pm (£10.80, 1½ hours). It must be prebooked. There is a combined entrance and bus-fare ticket that costs £18.

Southeastern Trains also offer an 'All-In-One' ticket combining travel from London Victoria to Bearsted Station (£25.50, one hour), a connecting coach service to and from Leeds Castle and castle admission.

SURREY

Surrey is *the* place for wealthy London commuters to choose when they sprog (reproduce), move out of the city and buy a country pad. As such there are two strands of residents – those who commute and earn fat bonuses and those who are local and don't – and some people mix better than others. Further away from the roaring motorways, the county reveals some inspiring landscapes made famous by authors Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.

FARNHAM

☎ 01252 / pop 36,298

Farnham is Surrey's most attractive market town. It's practically empty during the week, which makes it a lovely and relaxing place to visit. The town's main enticements include admiring the exquisite Georgian homes, shopping in the independent boutiques (some of which are on the pricey side), walking and cycling in the surrounding countryside, visiting the charming museum and popping into one of Surrey's only intact castles.

Orientation & Information

The easiest and most pleasant way to explore Farnham is on foot. The most interesting part of town is its historical centre, where East, West, South and Castle Sts meet.

The Borough (the eastern end of West St) is the town's main shopping street. The train station is at the southern end of South St (Station Hill).

The **Waverley Locality Office** (☎ 712667; tourism@farnham.gov.uk; South St; 🕒 9am-noon Mon & Sat, 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri) has free maps of the town and surrounding countryside, the free *Farnham Heritage Trail* and an updated list of accommodation in the area. It also offers free internet access.

You'll find an ATM on the Borough, near the corner of Castle St (where banks can be found). The main post office and a bureau de change are on West St, which is the continuation of the Borough.

Guided walks (☎ 718119; adult/child £3/1) of approximately 1½ hours run at 3pm on the first Sunday of every month between April and October. Meet at the entrance of the Wagon Yard car park at the southern end of Downing St.

Sights

FARNHAM CASTLE

The **castle keep** (☎ 252 2000; admission £2.80, audio tour free; 🕒 noon-5pm Fri-Sun & public holidays Apr-Sep) was constructed in 1138 by Henry de Blois, the grandson of William the Conqueror. There's not much left except the beautiful old ramparts. Even if the keep is closed, it's worth walking around the outside (everyone seems to ignore the private signs) to drink in the lovely view.

A residential palace house, Farnham Castle was built in the 13th century for the bishops of Winchester as a stopover on London journeys. From 1926 to the 1950s it was taken over by the bishops of Guildford. It's now owned by the Farnham Castle International Briefing & Conference Centre but you can visit it on a **guided tour** (🕒 2-4pm Wed).

Farnham Castle is located up the old steps at the top of Castle St.

MUSEUM OF FARNHAM

This appealing **museum** (☎ 715094; 38 West St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) is located in the splendid Willmer House, a Georgian town house built for wealthy hop merchant and maltster John Thorne in 1718. Since it opened in 1962, the museum has won many awards, including the European Museum of the Year Award.

The museum traces the history of Farnham through themes such as 'country life', 'art and architecture', 'on the road' and 'town life'. Kids will envy the amazing 1780s **dolls' house**, modelled on the house next door and built for the Manwaring children.

Possibly the most precious exhibit is a morning cap that once belonged to Charles I. He stayed in the house that's now the Waverley Locality Office on his way to trial in Westminster Hall in 1648, and gave the cap to his host Sir Henry Vernon as a souvenir, perhaps mindful that he would no longer be needing it…

Sleeping

Accommodation in Farnham tends towards the midrange to top end.

Sandiway (☎ 710721; 24 Shortheath Rd; s/d £30/50; Ⓟ 🚭) This spot is about a 15-minute walk from town in a 1920s house with a pleasant garden.

Exchange Hotel (☎ 726673; Station Hill; s/d £49.35/69.95; Ⓟ 💻 wi-fi) After a full refurb there are nine attractive en-suite rooms with TV at a good price just by the station.

our pick **Bush Hotel** (☎ 0870 400 8225; www.macdonald-hotels.co.uk/bush; the Borough; s/d Mon-Thu £168/178, Fri-Sun £117/130; ❄) Set back from the road, this central, charming 17th-century inn has 82 well-turned-out rooms, a cosy Coachman's Bar with suitably wonky-beamed ceiling and a pleasant restaurant.

Eating & Entertainment

Farnham has a good choice of tempting eateries.

Colony Restaurant (☎ 725108; 68 Castle St; dishes £3.50-7.50; 🕒 dinner only Mon, closed Sun) Very tasty Peking cuisine on attractive Castle St.

our pick **Nelson Arms** (☎ 716078; 50 Castle St; 2-course lunch £7.95, dinner £8.95-16.50) A superb mix of old-world charm and contemporary chic, this gastropub is understandably popular with the locals. Try the delicious homemade burger.

Coach Bar Restaurant (☎ 724520; Castle St; mains under £10) This blue-and-white-fronted tapas bar at the bottom of Castle St has a sleek metal bar, cool colour scheme, DJs, occasional salsa nights and great nosh. There are larger dishes if tapas won't sate your hunger.

Farnham Maltings (☎ 726234; Bridge Sq; www.farnhammaltings.com) This multipurpose venue has a riverside bar, live music, exhibitions, fairs, movies, workshops and comedy.

Getting There & Away

Half-hourly train services run from London Waterloo (50 minutes). From Winchester, trains depart every 45 minutes for Woking (30 minutes). Change there for half-hourly trains to Farnham (25 minutes). The train station is

STROLL THE SURREY HILLS

There are plenty of enchanting walks through the Surrey Hills. Find different routes on www.surreyhills.org or grab leaflets from the Waverley Locality Office (p203). Frensham Ponds, Box Hill and Tilford are particularly scenic spots.

at the end of South St, on the other side of the A31 from the old town centre.

Stagecoach (☎ 01256-464501) bus X64 runs from Winchester to Farnham at 10 minutes past the hour (one hour and 10 minutes). The stop is on the Borough.

AROUND FARNHAM

Waverley Abbey

The inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's eponymous novel, the Waverley Abbey ruins sit almost forlornly on the banks of the River Wey about 2 miles southeast of Farnham.

This was the first Cistercian abbey built in England (construction began in 1128) and, like Beaulieu Abbey in the New Forest, was based on a parent abbey at Cîteaux in France.

Across the Wey is the impressive **Waverley Abbey House** (closed to the public), built in 1783 using bricks from the demolished abbey. In the 19th century it was owned by Florence Nightingale's brother-in-law, and the famous nurse was a regular visitor. Fittingly, the house was used as a military hospital in WWI. Since 1973 it has been the headquarters of the Crusade for World Revival (CWR), a Christian charity.

The abbey and house are off the B3001.

Hindhead

The tiny hamlet of Hindhead, 8 miles south of Farnham off the A287, lies in the middle of the largest area of open heath in Surrey. During the 19th century a number of prominent Victorians bought up property in the area, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes. One of the three founders of the National Trust, Sir Robert Hunter, lived in nearby Haslemere, and today much of the area is administered by the foundation.

The most beautiful part of the area is to the northeast, where you'll find a natural depression known as the **Devil's Punchbowl**. There are several excellent trails and bridle paths here. For the best view, head for Gibbet Hill (280m), which was once an execution ground.

The **Hindhead YHA Hostel** (☎ 01428-604285; www.yha.org.uk; Devil's Punchbowl, Thursley; dm £11.95) is a completely secluded cottage run by the National Trust on the northern edge of the Punchbowl. It's perfect if you like walking – the nearest bus stop and car park are a half-mile away.

Bus 19 runs every hour to Hindhead from Farnham.

BERKSHIRE

Home to royals and prime ministers, posh and prosperous Berkshire is and has long been the home county of many of England's most important figures. The top toff of the lot, the Queen, regularly stops in to spend time at her favourite castle. But aside from the impressive fortress at Windsor, the county is full of exquisitely maintained villages and fabulous countryside.

WINDSOR & ETON

☎ 01753 / pop 30,568

Windsor and the adjacent college town of Eton are two of the most visited destinations in the country, and with good reason. Windsor Castle, with its romantic architecture, superb state rooms and traditional changing of the guard, is an absolute must-see. It's so prominent, you'd be hard pressed to visit Windsor and avoid it. Over the water, Eton is a quieter town with England's most famous public school and a clutch of endearing antique shops. Not forgetting the Thames itself, which flows attractively between the two towns and is just asking for a boat trip.

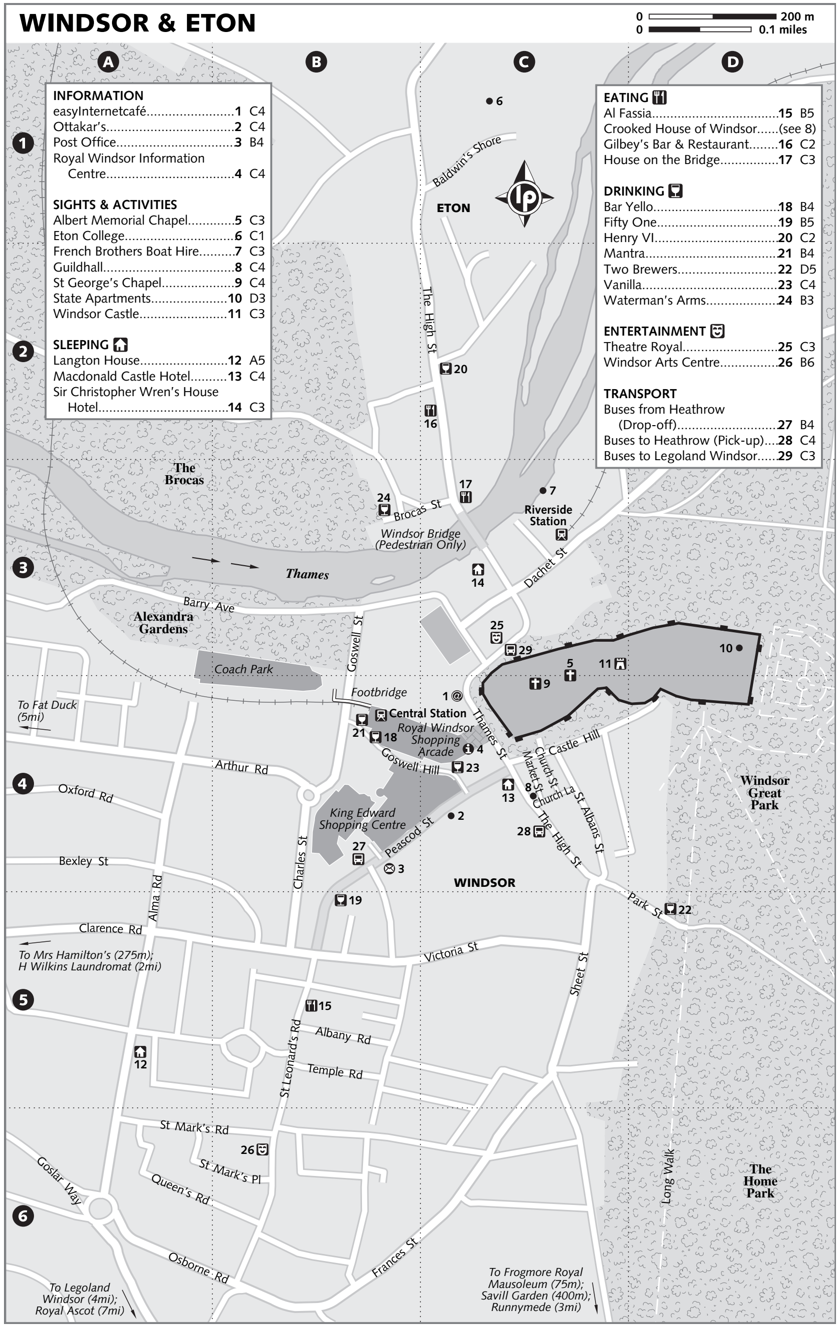
Orientation

The town of Windsor sits beside the River Thames, dwarfed by Windsor Castle. Skirting the castle are Thames St and Castle Hill, but the town's main drag is pedestrianised Peascod St. The village of Eton is on the far side of a small pedestrian bridge spanning the swan-filled Thames.

Information

The **Royal Windsor Information Centre** (☎ 743900; www.windsor.gov.uk; Old Booking Hall, Windsor Royal Shopping Arcade; 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Sun-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-Mar) is an agent for the National Express bus service

WINDSOR & ETON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ETON
Baldwin's Shore
The High St
The Brocas
Brocas St
Windsor Bridge (Pedestrian Only)
Riverside Station
Thames
Dachet St
Barry Ave
Alexandra Gardens
Coach Park
Goswell St
Footbridge
Central Station
Royal Windsor Shopping Arcade
Thames St
Castle Hill
Goswell Hill
Church St
Market St
Church La
St Albans St
The High St
To Fat Duck (5mi)
Arthur Rd
Oxford Rd
King Edward Shopping Centre
Peascod St
Bexley St
Alma Rd
Charles St
WINDSOR
Park St
Windsor Great Park
Clarence Rd
To Mrs Hamilton's (275m); H Wilkins Laundromat (2mi)
Victoria St
Sheet St
Albany Rd
St Leonard's Rd
Temple Rd
St Mark's Rd
St Mark's Pl
Queen's Rd
Goslar Way
Osborne Rd
Frances St
Long Walk
The Home Park
To Legoland Windsor (4mi); Royal Ascot (7mi)
To Frogmore Royal Mausoleum (75m); Savill Garden (400m); Runnymede (3mi)

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and sells tickets to some local attractions. It also offers an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 743907; £5).

Both the tourist office and post office have bureaus de change. There are plenty of ATMs along the High and Thames Sts.

The **post office** (🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is in Peascod St, Windsor. High-speed internet is available in McDonald's easyInternetcafé on Thames St, Windsor, and for books there's **Ottakar's** (20/21 Peascod St, Windsor).

H Wilkins (67 Dedworth Rd, Windsor; 🕒 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) will take care of all your washing and dry-cleaning needs.

Sights

WINDSOR CASTLE

The largest and oldest occupied fortress in the world, **Windsor Castle** (☎ 020-7766 7304; adult/child £13.50/7.50; 🕒 9.45am-4pm Mar-Oct, 9.45am-3pm Nov-Feb) is a majestic and robust vision of battlements and towers, and the Queen's weekend retreat.

At 30m above the Thames, the only naturally defendable spot in the Thames valley was the perfect pitch for William the Conqueror to build a Norman motte and bailey in 1070 as part of his fortifications around London. And once he clocked the quality hunting nearby, the site got its second purpose – a royal residence. Successive monarchs have put their own stamp on the castle: Henry II replaced the wooden stockade in 1165 with a stone round tower and built the outer walls to the north, east and south; Charles II gave the state apartments a baroque makeover; George IV swept in with his preference for Gothic style; Queen Victoria left the beautiful Albert Memorial Chapel. The castle largely escaped the bombings of WWII, but in 1992 a shocking fire sparked in the Queen's private chapel and tore through the building destroying or damaging more than 100 rooms. Thankfully the rooms were being rewired at the time and most artistic treasures had been removed. The marvellous restoration took five years and that devastating night is now a mere memory.

Weather and other events permitting, the **changing of the guard** takes place at 11am Monday to Saturday April to June and on alternate days the rest of the year. In summer the crowd congregates by the gate but if you stay to the right you'll have a better view. A fabulous spectacle of pomp, with loud commands, whispered conversations, shuffling and stamping feet (no wonder they have such big boots), all accompanied by the triumphant tootles of a military band, it's not to be missed.

The State Apartments and St George's Chapel are closed at times during the year – see www.royalcollection.org.uk for details. To see whether the Queen is in residence, look for the Royal Standard flying from the Round Tower.

St George's Chapel closes on Sunday but you can attend Evensong at 5.15pm (daily). There are two free guided tours of the castle precinct per hour, which leave from the audio-tour shop and end at the State Apartments. Multilingual audio tours of the castle (including the State Apartments) are included in your ticket price or you can purchase a guidebook for £4.95.

Finally, this is a really popular attraction so arrive early and be prepared to queue.

Queen Mary's Dolls' House

Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for Queen Mary in 1924, this incredible dolls' house was intended to accurately depict households of the day, albeit on a scale of 1:12. The attention to detail is spellbinding and there's even running water, electricity and lighting and vintage wine in the cellar!

State Apartments

After the dolls' house, a **gallery** with drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and a **China Museum**, visitors enter the stunning State Apartments, home to some exquisite paintings and architecture and still used by the Queen.

The **Grand Staircase** sets the tone for the rooms, all of which are elaborate, opulent and suitably regal. Highlights include **St George's Hall**, which incurred the most damage during the fire of 1992. The dining chairs here, dwarfed by the scale of the room, are standard size. On the ceiling, the shields of the Knights of the Garter (originally from George IV's time here) were re-created after the fire.

For intimate gatherings (just 60 people), the Queen entertains in the **Waterloo Chamber** – the supershiny table is French-polished and then dusted by someone walking over it with dusters on their feet (an unconventional but clearly effective approach). During large parties this room is used for dancing (try to imagine the princes rocking to a DJ in here) and the table is tripled in size and set up in St George's Hall.

The **King's Dressing Room** has some of the most important Renaissance paintings in the royal collection. Alongside Sir Anthony Van Dyck's magnificent *Triple Portrait* of Charles I you'll see works by Hans Holbein, Rembrandt, Peter Paul Rubens and Albrecht Dürer. Charles II kipped in here instead of in the **King's Bedchamber** – maybe George IV's magnificent bed (now on display) would have tempted him.

St George's Chapel

This elegant chapel, commissioned for the Order of the Garter by Edward IV in 1475, is one of Britain's finest examples of Perpendicular Gothic architecture. The nave and fan-vaulted roof were completed under Henry VII but the final nail was struck under Henry VIII in 1528.

The chapel – along with Westminster Abbey – serves as a **royal mausoleum**, and its tombs read like a history of the British monarchy. Here you'll find the tombs of Edward IV (r 1461–83), George V (r 1910–36) and Queen Mary (1867–1953), and George VI (r 1936–52). The most recent royal burial occurred in April 2002, when the body of George VI's widow, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother (1900–2002), was transported here in a splendid and sombre procession and buried alongside her husband.

In between the garter stalls, in the **Royal Vault** lie George III (r 1760–1820), George IV (r 1820–30) and William IV (r 1830–37). Another vault contains Henry VIII (r 1509–47); his favourite wife (the third of six) Jane Seymour (1509–37); and Charles I (r 1625–49), reunited with his head after it was chopped off during the Civil War.

The gigantic **battle sword** of Edward III, founder of the Order of the Garter, is mounted on the wall near the tombs of Henry VI (r 1422–61 and 1470), and Edward VII (r 1901–10) and Queen Alexandra (1844–1925).

On 9 April 2005 Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles were blessed here following their civil marriage in the **Guildhall**. A full symphony orchestra and around 800 guests probably made up for the Queen's apparent refusal to hold the wedding due to both parties being previously divorced.

Albert Memorial Chapel

Originally built in 1240 and dedicated to Edward the Confessor, this small chapel was the place of worship for the Order of the Garter until St George's Chapel snatched that honour. After the death of Prince Albert at Windsor Castle in 1861 Queen Victoria ordered its elaborate redecoration as a tribute to her husband. A major feature of the restoration is the magnificent vaulted roof whose gold mosaic pieces were crafted in Venice. There's a monument to the prince, although he's actually buried with Queen Victoria in the Frogmore Royal Mausoleum in the castle grounds.

Windsor Great Park

Stretching behind Windsor Castle almost all the way to Ascot, Windsor Great Park covers about 40 sq miles. There is a lake, walking tracks, a bridleway and gardens. The **Savill Garden** (☎ 860222; 🕒 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is particularly lovely. Admission ranges from £4 to £5.50 (adult) and £2 to £2.75 (child) depending on the time of year.

The **Long Walk** is a 3-mile walk along a tree-lined path from King George IV Gate to the Copper Horse statue (of George III) on Snow Hill, the highest point of the park. Locals have informed us that the Queen occasionally drives herself down the Long Walk, accompanied only by a bodyguard. The walk is signposted from the town centre.

ETON COLLEGE

Cross the Thames by the pedestrian-only Windsor Bridge to arrive at another enduring symbol of England's class system: **Eton College** (☎ 671177; adult/child £4/3.25, tours £5/4.20; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mar, Apr & Jul-Sep [school holidays], 2-4.30pm term-time, guided tours 2.15pm & 3.15pm), the

WORTH THE TRIP

Get your best hat out for *the* event of the horse-racing calendar: **Royal Ascot**, a four-day festival taking place at the Ascot racecourse in the middle of June. Following a £200 million makeover, the ground is now an even more spectacular setting for spotting royalty, celebrities, men in suits, women in incredible couture confections – oh, and horses. Book tickets well in advance. In 2006 tickets for the Grandstand and Paddock started at £54 per day, but you can soak up the atmosphere in less formal attire in the Silver Ring from a mere £15. Call ☎ 01344-876876 for information, or check the website at www.ascot.co.uk.

largest and most famous public (meaning very private) school in England. It was founded by Henry VI in 1440–41 with a view towards educating 70 highly qualified boys awarded a scholarship from a fund endowed by the king. Every year since then, 70 King's Scholars have been chosen based on the results of a highly competitive exam for boys aged 12 to 14; these pupils are housed in separate quarters from the rest of the 1000 or so other students, who are known as Oppidans.

While the King's Scholars are chosen exclusively on the basis of exam results, Oppidans must be able to foot the bill for £23,000-per-annum fees as well as passing entrance exams. Its alumni count no fewer than 18 prime ministers, as well as a few royals, including hunky Prince William.

The college is open to visitors. Tours take in the **chapel** (which you can see from Windsor Castle), the **cloisters**, the **Museum of Eton Life**, **lower school** and the **school yard**.

LEGOLAND WINDSOR

Windsor's other great attraction – for those still in short trousers – **Legoland** (☎ 08705 040404; www.legoland.co.uk; adult/3-15yr £30/23; 🕒 10am-5pm/6pm/7pm depending on day of the week, see website) is a crazy world of model masterpieces, live shows, 3-D cinema, white-knuckle rides and tamer activities (drive your own JCB digger anyone?). If you prebook online you save about £2 (but you need to be able to print out your ticket).

Buses run from Thames St to Legoland between 10am and 5.15pm.

Tours

Open-top double-decker bus tours of the towns are run by **City Sightseeing Tours** (adult/child £7/3.50; 🕒 every ½hr daily Mar-Sep, Sat & Sun Nov & Dec) and leave from Castle Hill opposite Ye Harte & Garter Hotel. From Easter to October, **French Brothers Boat Hire** (☎ 851900; www.frenchbrothers.co.uk; Clewer Court Rd, Windsor; 🕒 11am-5pm) runs a variety of boat trips to Runnymede, Maidenhead and around Windsor and Eton. The 45-minute round trip to Runnymede costs £4.50 for adults and £2.25 for children. Boats leave from just next to the Windsor Bridge. If you fancy doing the hop-on-hop-off bus plus a 35-minute boat trip, a combined boat-and-bus ticket costs £9.50/5.

Sleeping

Windsor has a good selection of quality hotels and B&Bs. Since the YHA hostel burned down in 2004 there are few budget options. At the time of writing Travelodge (uninspiring but affordable) was due to open in summer 2007 on the corner of Goswell Hill and Goswell St (www.travelodge.co.uk).

Mrs Hamilton's (☎ 865775; 22 York Ave, Windsor; s/d £35/58; P) Large bright rooms and very friendly service make this an extremely comfortable place to stay.

Langton House (☎ 858299; www.langtonhouse.com; 46 Alma Rd, Windsor; s/d/tr £63/75/90; P ⊠ 💻) The four elegant rooms at Langton House are superb (three are en suite, one has a private bathroom), and its friendly owners are always on hand to fill you in with local information, offer guided walks, provide tips on surviving Legoland etc.

Macdonald Castle Hotel (☎ 0870 400 8300; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/castle; 18 High St, Windsor; s/d weekdays £132/170, weekends £235/210; P 💻 wi-fi) This newly refurbished traditional-style hotel has a smashing location and large car park right in the centre of town. Guests can see weddings at the Guildhall opposite – recent celebrity ceremonies include Charles and Camilla, and Elton John and David Furnish – and the castle turrets from the 1st floor. Opt for a four-poster bed in the main building, a 500-year-old coaching inn with charming sloping floors and wooden beams.

our pick **Sir Christopher Wren's House Hotel** (☎ 861354; www.sirchristopherwren.co.uk; Thames St, Windsor; s/d £165/220; P) For comfortable rooms, wonderful river views, a terrace overlooking Windsor Bridge and a pampering spa and gym, this luxurious 90-room hotel built by the man himself in 1676 fits the bill. Its 'sister' hotel the Christopher, across the way in Eton, is a delightful boutique hotel (but there's no spa).

Eating

There are plenty of eateries in Windsor and Eton: here's a selection.

our pick **Crooked House of Windsor** (☎ 857534; 52 High St, Windsor; mains £5.50-9; 🕒 dinner Wed-Sat only) This little black-and-white house looks like it's had too much to drink. Enjoy a light lunch, a Royal cream tea (tea and scones with clotted cream and jam; £7 to £12) or dinner (bring your own wine). A member of the Slow Food movement, which advocates healthy eating, this adorable restaurant sources its produce locally.

Al Fassia (☎ 855370; 27 St Leonard's Rd, Windsor; mains £8.50-12.95) Situated away from the tourist hubbub, this Moroccan restaurant has a very good reputation. With its traditional wall hangings, mosaic tables, lanterns and other knick-knacks, it's a pleasant place for lunch or dinner.

Gilbey's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 854921; 82-83 High St, Eton; mains £11-18.50) This attractive restaurant has a courtyard garden and good wines.

House on the Bridge (☎ 790197; 71a High St, Windsor Bridge, Eton; mains £16.50-20.95) This formal, elegant restaurant overlooks the Thames and the castle.

Drinking

Windsor and Eton are packed with pubs, and a few trendy bars have sprung up.

Henry VI (☎ 866051; 37 High St, Eton) A supercool pub in which to sip an afternoon pint and discuss poetry. On Friday and Saturday evenings rock out to live pop music.

our pick **Two Brewers** (☎ 855426; 34 Park St, Windsor) A gorgeous 17th-century inn perched just near Windsor Great Park and the Long Walk.

Mantra (☎ 831331; 19-21 The Arches, Goswell Hill, Windsor; after 9pm £5; 🕒 Fri & Sat, closed Mon) The chandeliers and exposed brickwork make this bar-club under the railway arches a chic evening option (no trainers) for the over-25 crowd.

Vanilla (☎ 831122; 15a Goswell Hill, Windsor; after 9pm Sat £5, prices vary Fri) This funky bar-club has a champagne-and-cocktail bar, dance floor, lounge area and a snappy dress code.

Also recommended:

Bar Yello (☎ 622667; Goswell Hill, Windsor) Another boozing option under the railway arches.

Fifty One (☎ 755950; 51 Peascod St, Windsor) Slightly lacking in atmosphere, this bar has live music on Wednesday and theme nights such as Brazilian samba.

Waterman's Arms (☎ 861001; Brocas St, Eton) *The* place to meet rowers.

Entertainment

Windsor Arts Centre (☎ 859336; cnr St Leonard's & St Mark's Rds, Windsor) A comedy, film, theatre, live music and dance venue with events for kids.

Theatre Royal (☎ 853888; 32-34 Thames St, Windsor) Features a wide repertoire of theatre productions, from pantomime to first runs.

Getting There & Away

Windsor is 21 miles west of central London and 15 minutes by car from Heathrow airport.

BUS

Green Line bus 702 departs for Windsor and Legoland from London Victoria coach station hourly (about every two hours on Sunday; £7, 1¼ hours). Bus 77 connects Windsor with Heathrow airport. Buses depart from High St, Windsor, opposite the Parish Church and head to Heathrow Central Station. For further details phone **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608).

TRAIN

There are two Windsor and Eton train stations – Central station on Thames St, opposite Windsor Castle, and Riverside station near the bridge to Eton.

From London Waterloo, trains run to Riverside station every half-hour (hourly on Sunday). Some services from London Paddington to Central station require a change at Slough, five minutes from Windsor, but take about the same time with a similar fare (£7, 50 minutes).

AROUND WINDSOR & ETON

Runnymede

In June 1215 King John met his barons and bishops in a large field 3 miles southeast of Windsor, and over the next few days they

WORTH THE TRIP

Fat Duck (☎ 01628-580333; High St, Bray) If you've ever fancied mixing sweet and savoury tastes, with dishes such as smoked-bacon-and-egg ice cream, sardine-on-toast sorbet or snail porridge, this is the place to visit. The menu may sound odd, but experimental and self-taught chef Heston Blumenthal was awarded an OBE by the Queen in January 2006 and the Fat Duck was voted 'The Best Restaurant in the World' by 600 critics the year before – so he must be doing something right. This acclaimed gastronomic outing comes at a price – the Tasting Menu costs £90 per person including wine, while dining à la carte will set you back at least £80 – but it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. (It could help you with future 'how can I combine the random leftovers in my fridge into a nice meal?' dilemmas too.) To get there by car take the A308 from Windsor then follow signs for Bray Village. Drive into the village and you'll see the Fat Duck on your right.

hammered out an agreement on a basic charter of rights guaranteeing the liberties of the king's subjects and restricting the monarch's absolute power. The document they signed was, of course, Magna Carta, the world's first constitution. It formed the basis for statutes and charters throughout the world's democracies. (Both the national and state constitutions of the United States, drawn up more than 500 years later, paraphrase directly from this document.)

Runnymede – from the Anglo-Saxon words *ruinige* (take council) and *moed* (meadow) – was chosen because it was the largest piece of open land between the king's residence at Windsor and the bishop's palace at Staines. Today the field remains pretty much as it was, except now it features two **lodges** (1930) designed by Sir Edward Lutyens. In the woods behind the field are two **memorials**, the first to Magna Carta designed by Sir Edward Maufe (1957). The second is to John F Kennedy, and was built by Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1965 on an acre of land granted in perpetuity to the US government following Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Magna Carta Tea Rooms (☎ 01784-477110; Gate Lodge, Windsor Rd), in one of Lutyens' lodges, does a pretty good cream tea in the afternoons.

Bus 41 stops near here on the Windsor–Egham route.

HAMPSHIRE

Think of Hampshire and images of petticoated heroines, stiff-backed gentlemen and rolling rural landscapes of novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817) may spring to mind. But while still blessed with those undulating chalk downs and fertile agricultural valleys, this is a remarkably varied county. Winchester, once capital of the powerful Kingdom of Wessex that extended into Wiltshire and Dorset, delights with its fascinating cathedral and beautiful setting. The coastline too is rich in maritime history, not least at Portsmouth, home of the once-mighty Royal Navy. And Hampshire's south-western corner also claims the lovely open heath and woodlands of the New Forest.

WINCHESTER

☎ 01962 / pop 41,420

The ancient, wistful and often eye-wateringly lovely cathedral city of Winchester is a must for all visitors to the region. A capital of Saxon kings and power-base of bishops, the city's rich history is reflected in heroic statues, handsome Elizabethan and Regency buildings, narrow winding streets and, above all, the wondrous cathedral that marks its centre. Thanks to its moist location, nestled in a valley of the River Itchen, there are also charming waterside trails to explore, and as walkers will be well aware, the city marks the beginning of the beautiful South Downs Way (see p183).

History

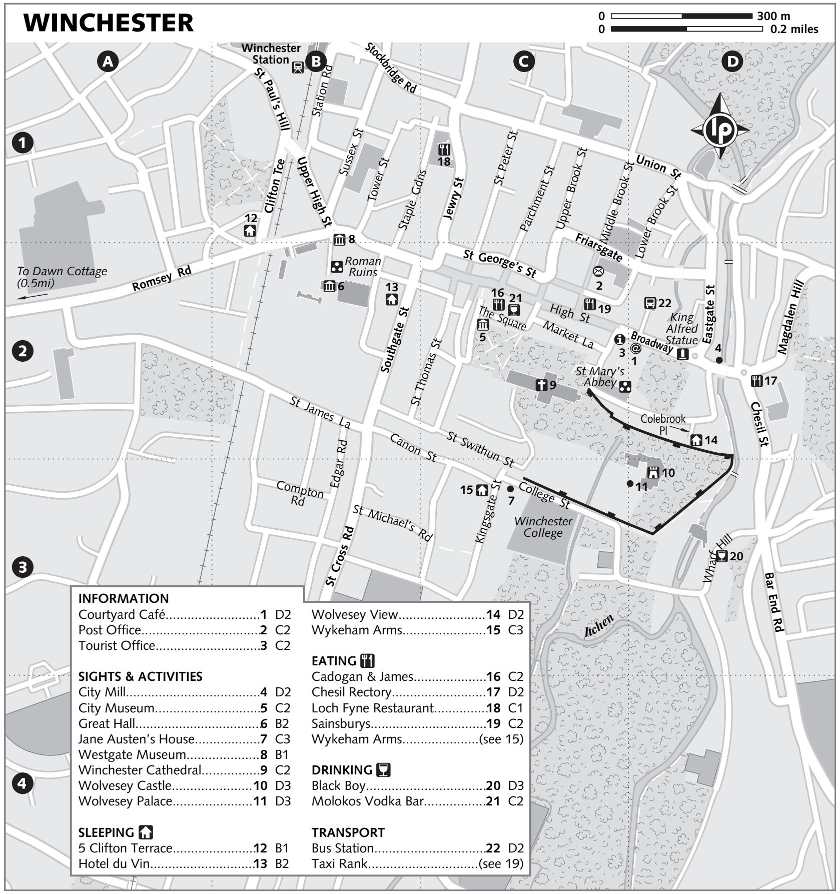
The Romans first put their feet under the table here, but Winchester really took off when the powerful West Saxon bishops moved their Episcopal see here in AD 670. Thereafter, Winchester was the most important town in the powerful kingdom of Wessex. King Alfred the Great (r 871–99) made it his capital, and it remained so under Knut (r 1016–35) and the Danish kings. After the Norman invasion of 1066, William the Conqueror arrived here to claim the throne of England, and in 1086 he commissioned local monks to write the all-important *Domesday Book*, an administrative survey of the whole country and the most important clerical accomplishment of the Middle Ages. Winchester thrived until the 12th century, when a fire gutted most of the city, after which London took its crown. A long slump lasted until the 18th century, when the town revived as a market town.

Orientation

The city centre is compact and easily managed on foot. Partly pedestrianised High St runs from west to east through the town. The bus station is smack in the middle of town opposite the Guildhall and tourist office, while the train station is five minutes' walk northwest. Jewry St borders the western centre and was once part of the Jewish quarter.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 840500; www.visitwinchester.co.uk; Broadway; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), in the pompous Gothic Revival Guildhall, has information and an accommodation booking service. The **Courtyard Café** (☎ 840820; per 30min £2), also in the Guildhall, has internet access. There's a **post office** (🕘 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) on Middle Brook St, and there are plenty of banks and ATMs on High St.



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Courtyard Café	**1**	D2
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Tourist Office	**3**	C2
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City Mill	**4**	D2
City Museum	**5**	C2
Great Hall	**6**	B2
Jane Austen's House	**7**	C3
Westgate Museum	**8**	B1
Winchester Cathedral	**9**	C2
Wolvesey Castle	**10**	D3
Wolvesey Palace	**11**	D3
SLEEPING		
5 Clifton Terrace	**12**	B1
Hotel du Vin	**13**	B2
Wolvesey View	**14**	D2
Wykeham Arms	**15**	C3
EATING		
Cadogan & James	**16**	C2
Chesil Rectory	**17**	D2
Loch Fyne Restaurant	**18**	C1
Sainsburys	**19**	C2
Wykeham Arms	(see 15)	
DRINKING		
Black Boy	**20**	D3
Molokos Vodka Bar	**21**	C2
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	**22**	D2
Taxi Rank	(see 19)	

Sights

WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Almost a thousand years of history is crammed into Winchester's superb **cathedral** (☎ 857200; www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk; adult/under 16yr/student £4/free/2; 🕘 8.30am-6pm), which is not only the city's star attraction but one of southern England's most inspirational buildings. Admittedly it makes an unusual picture from outside, with a squat, almost half-hearted tower, a slightly sunken rear and a fine Gothic façade. But once inside you'll be struck by the one of the longest medieval naves (164m) in Europe, and a fascinating jumble of features from all eras.

The cathedral sits beside foundations marking the town's original minster church built in 643. It was begun in 1070 and completed in 1093, and subsequently entrusted with the bones of its patron saint, St Swithin (bishop of Winchester from 852 to 862), who is best known for the proverb that if it rains on St Swithin's day, 15 July, it will rain for a further 40 days and 40 nights.

Soggy ground and poor workmanship did not augur well for the early church; the original tower collapsed in 1107 and major restructuring continued until the mid-15th century. At the cathedral's rear you'll spy a monument to diver William Walker, who is celebrated as having saved the cathedral from collapse by delving repeatedly into its waterlogged underbelly from 1906 to 1912 to bolster rotting wooden foundations with vast quantities of concrete and brick.

Advancing down the south side of the nave, it's worth being sidetracked by the **Cathedral Library & Triforium Gallery** (adult/senior & under 16yr £1/free; 🕒 11am-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Mon Apr-Oct), which affords a fine elevated view of the cathedral body and an up-close view of the dazzling illuminated pages of the 12th-century *Winchester Bible* – its colours as bright as if they were painted yesterday.

There's also the opportunity to walk over the bones of one of England's best loved authors, Jane Austen, whose grave is near the entrance in the northern aisle. Austen died a stone's throw from the cathedral in 1817 at **Jane Austen's House** (College St), where she spent her last six weeks; it's now a private residence.

The transepts are the most original parts of the cathedral, and the intricately carved medieval choir stalls are another must-see, sporting everything from mythical beasts to a mischievous green man.

Flooding often prevents **crypt tours** (free; 🕒 tours 10.30am, 12.30pm & 2.30pm Mon-Sat) from going ahead, but you may still be able to peek inside to see the poignant solitary sculpture by Anthony Gormley called *Sound 2*.

Cathedral body **tours** (free; 🕒 tours every hour 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) are run by enthusiastic volunteers and last one hour. There are also **tower and roof tours** (£4; 🕒 tours 2.15pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat, plus 11.30am Sat Oct-May, 2.15pm Mon-Sat, plus 11.30am Sat Jun-Sep) up narrow stairwells and with views as far as Portsmouth. Sunday services take place at 8am, 10am and 11.15am, with evensong at 3.30pm. Evensong is also held at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday.

GREAT HALL

Winchester's other showpiece is at the cavernous **Great Hall** (☎ 846476; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), the only part of 11th-century Winchester Castle that Oliver Cromwell spared from destruction. It's just south off Romsey Rd. Crowning the wall like a giant-sized dartboard of green and cream spokes is what centuries of mythology have called **King Arthur's Round Table**. Before you get too excited, it's a 700-year-old fake, but a fascinating one nonetheless. It's thought to have been constructed in the late 13th century and later painted in the reign of Henry VIII (King Arthur's image is strangely reminiscent of Henry's youthful face).

This hall was also the stage for several dramatic English courtroom dramas, including the trial of adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh in 1603, who was sentenced to death but reprieved at the last minute.

Outside, near the hall's entrance, there's also a section of the old Roman wall, built around AD 200.

MUSEUMS

City Museum (☎ 863064; www.winchester.gov.uk/heritage; The Square; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) whizzes through Winchester's fascinating Roman and Saxon history, lingers on its Anglo-Norman golden age, pays homage to Jane Austen, and reconstructs several early-20th-century Winchester shops.

Fitting snugly into one of Winchester's two surviving medieval gateways, **Westgate Museum** (☎ 848269; High St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Feb & Mar) is a one-time debtors' prison with a macabre set of gibbeting irons last used to display an executed criminal's body in 1777. Scrawled crudely all over the interior walls is the 17th-century graffiti of prisoners.

WOLVESEY CASTLE & PALACE

The crumbling remains of early-12th-century **Wolvesey Castle** (EH; ☎ 023-9237 8291; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) still sulk in the protective embrace of the city's walls, despite the building having been largely demolished in the 1680s. According to legend, its name comes from a Saxon king's demand for an annual payment of 300 wolves' heads. It was completed by Henry de Blois, and served as the bishop of Winchester's residence throughout the medieval era. Queen Mary I and Philip II of Spain celebrated their wedding feast here in 1554. Today the bishop lives in the adjacent Wolvesey Palace.

CITY MILL

This 18th-century water-powered **mill** (NT; ☎ 870057; Bridge St; adult/child £3.20/1.60; 🕒 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Dec, also Mon & Tue Jun-Dec) straddles the river with an island garden. It's now a working water mill once again, and you can see the grinding process in action.

Activities

There are several options for a quiet amble through surrounding countryside, lanes or riverside parks. The 1-mile **Water Meadows Walk** can be picked up near the entrance to Wolvesey Castle and goes to the fascinating 12th-century Hospital of St Cross, built to feed and bed pilgrims and crusaders en route to the Holy Land. The tranquil **Riverside Walk** trails a short distance from the castle along the bank of the River Itchen to High St. The stiffer walk up to **St Giles' Hill** rewards with fine city views. It's at the top of East Hill, half a mile from the castle, and is signposted.

Tours

A variety of 1½-hour **guided walks** (adult/under 16yr £3/free; 🕒 tours 11am & 2.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 2.30pm Sun Jun-Sep, 11am Sat Nov-Mar) are organised through the tourist office. From May to September, evening walks also leave every Tuesday at 6.30pm (adult/child £4/1), and encompass subjects as diverse as Jane Austen's Winchester and a spooky 'Bring out your dead' plague tour.

Sleeping

Budget accommodation is hard to come by. The tourist office's booking service costs £5, but can arrange some great deals.

Wolvesey View (☎ 852082; www.wintonian.com; 10 Colebrook Pl; s/d without bathroom £44/58; P ⊠) Squirreled away in a quiet cul de sac in the middle of town, this family home is easy strolling distance from the cathedral and Wolvesey Castle, which its Yellow Room overlooks. The three simplistic rooms share a bathroom, and its owners are extremely knowledgeable about the city.

5 Clifton Terrace (☎ 890053; chrissiejohnston@hotmail.com; 5 Clifton Tce; s/d/f £55/65/80; ⊠) This polished two-room B&B has a pleasant mix of new and antique furnishings, and a charming proprietor. It sits amid an elegant row of Georgian terraced town houses that rises to the west of town, a short walk from the train station.

Wykeham Arms (☎ 853834; www.accommodating-inns.co.uk; 75 Kingsgate St; r without bathroom £57, s/d £85/95; ⊠) A Winchester institution, as much for its quirky bar and food (see right) as its accommodation, this 18th-century inn also has 14 lovely, traditionally styled rooms above the pub and in the charming converted post office across the road. Highly recommended.

Dawn Cottage (☎ 869956; dawncottage@hotmail.com; 99 Romsey Rd; d £68; P ⊠) Worth the mile-long hike outside town, this utterly charming vine-covered property offers a particularly tranquil stay and friendly welcome, with lovely views, a sun deck and pretty gardens, and just three tastefully decorated rooms.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 841414; www.hotelduvin.com; Southgate St; r £120-175; P ⊠ wi-fi) Simple yet sophisticated, this fashionable boutique hotel will not only impress the wine-savvy clientele. Set in a handsome Georgian building from 1715, it offers 23 deeply comfortable rooms with organic, textured fabrics and plenty of mod cons. The bistro's famous in its own right. Breakfast is extra.

Eating

Sainsburys (☎ 861792; Middle Brook St) For everyday supplies try this supermarket.

Cadogan & James (☎ 840805; 31a The Square; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Self-caterers will need to be dragged out of this delightful delicatessen, full of the smells of freshly baked breads, herbs and spices, and gourmet goodies.

Wykeham Arms (☎ 853834; 75 Kingsgate St; mains £9-13.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner) You might face each other across graffiti-dotted old school desks in this character-packed pub-restaurant, but the mood is far more mischievous than studious. Walking canes and tankards hang from the ceiling and open fires warm clients in winter. The food is sublime, the sausages (flavoured with local bitter) are famous, and the sticky-toffee pudding addictive.

Loch Fyne Restaurant (☎ 872930; 18 Jewry St; mains £9-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Winchester's branch of this quality seafood chain is housed in a stunning Tudor jailhouse, full of twisted beams, wooden galleries and beautiful fireplaces. Depending on which section you're in, the atmosphere can be both lively and romantic.

Chesil Rectory (☎ 851555, 1 Chesil St; 2-/3-course lunch £19/23, 3-course dinner £45; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Duck through the hobbit-size door of this gorgeous 15th-century half-timbered building, Winchester's oldest house, to enjoy a romantic and refined setting in oak-beamed rooms. Its modern Continental cuisine is perfect for a special night out.

Drinking

Black Boy (☎ 861754; 1 Wharf Hill; 🕒 11am-11pm) A celebration of English eccentricity, this adorable old pub is filled with obsessive and sometimes freaky collections, from pocket watches to wax facial features, bear traps, sawn paperbacks and tobacco pipes. Even the women's toilets cheekily sport gynaecological clamps and fish murals.

Molokos Vodka Bar (☎ 849236; 31b The Square; 🕒 noon-midnight, to 2am Fri) One of the city's slicker contemporary venues, Molokos lures in the youth of Winchester with just about every flavour of vodka under the sun; it touts an R & B soundtrack and buzzing ambience. It graduates into a club on weekend nights.

Getting There & Away

Winchester is 65 miles from London and 15 miles from Southampton.

BUS

National Express has several direct buses to London Victoria Bus Station (£12.60, 2¼ hours). Buses also run to Southampton (30 minutes). Wilts & Dorset Explorer Tickets (adult/child £6.50/3.25) let you roam the region to the west, including the New Forest.

TRAIN

Train is often the more direct option. Trains leave every 20 minutes from London Waterloo (£22, one hour) and Southampton (15 to 23 minutes) and hourly from Portsmouth (£7.90, one hour). There are also fast links to the Midlands.

Getting Around

Your feet are the best form of transport. There's plenty of day parking within five minutes' walk of the centre or you can use the Park & Ride service for £2 per day. If you're staying for longer, consider joining the **Bikeabout** (☎ 847474; www.winchestermiracles.org; membership £15) scheme, which lets over-18s borrow bikes free for up to 24 hours at a time, as often as you like. Bikes can be picked up and dropped off at the tourist office, train station and St Catherine's Park & Ride.

For a taxi try the rank outside Sainsbury's on Middle Brook St or phone **Wintax Taxis** (☎ 878727).

PORTSMOUTH

☎ 023 / pop 187,056

Be sure to swash those buckles and practise your salty sea-dog arrrs before arriving at this brawny harbour city. For Portsmouth is the principal port of Britain's Royal Navy, and its historic dockyard ranks alongside Greenwich as Britain's most fascinating centre of maritime history. Here you can jump aboard Lord Nelson's glorious warship HMS *Victory,* which led the charge at Trafalgar in 1805, and glimpse the timber-shivering remains of Henry VIII's 16th-century flagship, the *Mary Rose.*

Regeneration at the nearby Gunwharf Quays has added new glitz to its scurvy-riddled waterfront. A spectacular millennium-inspired structure, the Spinnaker Tower – keelhauled by the British media for its delays and spiralling costs – finally opened here in 2005, with views to knock the wind from its critics' sails.

However, Portsmouth is by no means a city noted for its beauty; it was heavily bombed during WWII and a combination of soulless postwar architecture and surprisingly deserted waterfront promenades can leave a melancholy impression. An array of museums justify an overnight stay for naval nuts, however, and the suburb of Southsea boasts some fair beaches, bars and good restaurants.

Orientation

The central quay known as the Hard is where you'll find the Historic Dockyard, tourist office, train station, Spinnaker Tower and the passenger-ferry terminal for the Isle of Wight. Another hop east is Old Portsmouth and the Point, a cluster of sea-worn, atmospheric buildings around the old harbour. Southsea is about 2 miles south.

Information

Plentiful ATMs can be found on Osbourne Rd.

Laundry Care (☎ 9282 6245; 59 Osborne Rd; ⌚ 8am-6pm)

Online Café (☎ 9283 1106; 163 Elm Grove, Southsea; per 10min/hr 50p/£2.60; ⌚ 9am-10pm)

Post office (Palmerston Rd) In Southsea.

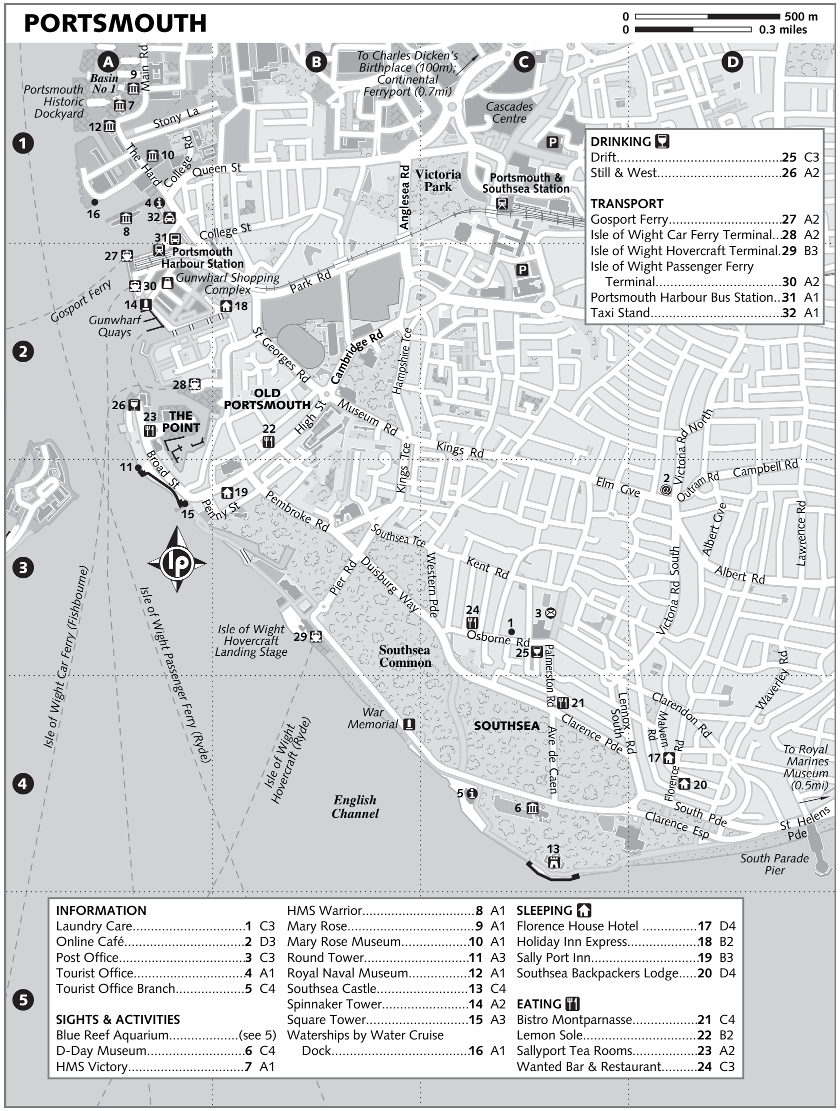
Tourist office (☎ 9282 6722; www.visitportsmouth.co.uk; The Hard; ⌚ 9.30am-5.45pm Apr-Sep, to 5.15pm Oct-Mar) Can arrange walking tours and has an accommodation service (£2).

Tourist office branch (☎ 9282 6722; Clarence Esplanade; ⌚ 9.30am-5.45pm Jun-Sep, to 5.15pm Mar-May, to 4pm Oct-Feb) Next to the Blue Reef Aquarium in Southsea, this branch gives discounts to several attractions for tickets bought in advance.

Sights & Activities

SPINNAKER TOWER

Spiking the sky 170m above Gunwharf Quays is Portsmouth's unmistakeable new seamark and symbol of the city's newfound razzle-dazzle, the **Spinnaker Tower** (☎ 857520; www.spinnakertower.co.uk; Gunwharf Quays; adult/child £5.95/4.80; ⌚ 10am-10pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri & Sat Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Sun-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat Nov-Mar). Opened an impressive *five years* later than originally planned in late 2005, and vastly over budget at £36 million, the construction is the tallest publicly accessible structure in the UK.



0 500 m
0 0.3 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
Portsmouth Historic Dockyard
Basin No 1
To Charles Dicken's Birthplace (100m); Continental Ferryport (0.7mi)
Cascades Centre
Victoria Park
Portsmouth & Southsea Station
Portsmouth Harbour Station
Gunwharf Shopping Complex
Gunwharf Quays
OLD PORTSMOUTH
THE POINT
Isle of Wight Hovercraft Landing Stage
Southsea Common
War Memorial
SOUTHSEA
English Channel
To Royal Marines Museum (0.5mi)
South Parade Pier
Isle of Wight Car Ferry (Fishbourne)
Isle of Wight Passenger Ferry (Ryde)
Isle of Wight Hovercraft (Ryde)
Gosport Ferry

PORTSMOUTH

DRINKING

Drift	25	C3
Still & West	26	A2

TRANSPORT

Gosport Ferry	27	A2
Isle of Wight Car Ferry Terminal	28	A2
Isle of Wight Hovercraft Terminal	29	B3
Isle of Wight Passenger Ferry Terminal	30	A2
Portsmouth Harbour Bus Station	31	A1
Taxi Stand	32	A1

INFORMATION

Laundry Care	1	C3
Online Café	2	D3
Post Office	3	C3
Tourist Office	4	A1
Tourist Office Branch	5	C4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Blue Reef Aquarium	(see 5)	
D-Day Museum	6	C4
HMS Victory	7	A1
HMS Warrior	8	A1
Mary Rose	9	A1
Mary Rose Museum	10	A1
Round Tower	11	A3
Royal Naval Museum	12	A1
Southsea Castle	13	C4
Spinnaker Tower	14	A2
Square Tower	15	A3
Waterships by Water Cruise Dock	16	A1

SLEEPING

Florence House Hotel	17	D4
Holiday Inn Express	18	B2
Sally Port Inn	19	B3
Southsea Backpackers Lodge	20	D4

EATING

Bistro Montparnasse	21	C4
Lemon Sole	22	B2
Sallyport Tea Rooms	23	A2
Wanted Bar & Restaurant	24	C3

Its two sweeping white arcs resemble a billowing sail from certain angles, and a sharp skeletal ribcage from others. There are extraordinary views from its three observation decks (not to mention the hair-raising view through a glass floor). Below, the glitzy mall, wide people-watching patios and promenade dotted with palm trees complete the designers' vision of Portsmouth in the new millennium – give or take a few years.

PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD

Portsmouth's biggest attraction, the **Historic Dockyard** (☎ 9286 1512; www.historicdockyard.co.uk; adult/child single-attraction ticket £10/8, all-inclusive ticket £16/13, season ticket £30/25; ⌚ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Nov-Mar, last admission 1½hr before closing) is a real bobby-dazzler. Set in the heart of the country's most important naval port, it comprises three stunning ships and a clutch of museums that pay homage to the historical might of the Royal Navy. Together they make for a full day's outing, though you may spend much of your time swimming through a tide of schoolchildren. The all-inclusive ticket lets you scramble about all the ships and museums and if you miss anything on your first visit, you can return within the next year to see the rest.

Ships

As resplendent as she is venerable, the dockyard's star attraction is **HMS Victory** (www.hms-victory.com), Lord Nelson's flagship at the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar and the site of his infamous 'Kiss me Hardy...' dying words when victory over the French had been secured. This remarkable ship is topped by a forest of ropes and masts, and weighted by a belly filled with cannons and paraphernalia for an 850-strong crew. Clambering through its decks is a stirring experience, though these days cannon fire is replaced with the dull thuds of visitors so in thrall that they forget the low overhead beams. There are excellent 40-minute tours.

Equally thrilling are the adjacent remains of 16th-century warship and darling of Henry VIII, the **Mary Rose** (www.maryrose.org), the only such ship on display in the world. This 700-tonne floating fortress sank off Portsmouth after a mysterious incident of 'human folly and bad luck' in 1545. In an astoundingly ambitious piece of marine archaeology, the ship was raised from its watery grave in 1982. It now presents a ghostly image that could teach Hollywood a few tricks, its vast flank preserved in dim lighting, dripping and glistening in a constant mist of sea water.

Anywhere else the magnificent warship **HMS Warrior**, built in 1860, would grab centre stage. This handsome fella was at the cutting edge of technology in its day, riding the transition from wood to iron and sail to steam. Visitors can wander freely around its four decks to imagine life in the Victorian navy.

Mary Rose Museum

You can bear witness to the Herculean salvage operation that raised the 16th-century *Mary Rose* and see many of its recovered treasures at this fascinating museum, which is filled with fascinating facts and audiovisual insights. Every half an hour there's a 15-minute film about the raising of the ship, which is a must for all who didn't see coverage of the astonishing event in 1982. Purchasing a single-attraction ticket to this museum includes admission to the ship itself.

Royal Naval Museum

This huge museum has five galleries of naval history, ship models, battle dioramas, medals, paintings and much more. Audiovisual displays re-create the Battle of Trafalgar and one even lets you take command of a battleship – see if you can cure the scurvy and avoid mutiny. One gallery is entirely devoted to Lord Nelson.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A short hop over the water from Gunwharf Quays but a world apart in atmosphere, the **Point** is home to the characterful cobbled streets of Old Portsmouth, populated by salty-dog pubs with outdoor seating ideally positioned to watch the passing stream of ferries and navy ships, and to ponder the Spinnaker Tower from a new angle.

Just off the Point you can mount the **Round Tower** (originally built by Henry V) and the **Square Tower** of 1494 and take a stroll along the old fort walls.

There's a cluster of attractions on Clarence Esplanade at the Southsea end of the waterfront. The unusually hands-on **Blue Reef Aquarium** (☎ 9287 5222; www.bluereefaquarium.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) has open-top tanks and huge underwater walkways and is a sure hit with kids. Another short stroll away is the bunkerlike **D-Day Museum** (☎ 9282 7261; www.ddaymuseum.co.uk; Clarence Esplanade; adult/child £6/3.60; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), which recounts Portsmouth's important role as departure point for the Allied D-Day forces in 1944.

Then right next door by the water is ugly grey **Southsea Castle** (☎ 9282 7261; www.southseacastle.co.uk; adult/child £3/1.80; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct), built by Henry VIII, and, by all accounts, from where he would have watched his beloved *Mary Rose* sink. The castle was much altered in the early 19th century and there's now a lighthouse plonked on its top.

Further south, the **Royal Marines Museum** (☎ 9281 9385; www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk; Barracks Rd; admission £4.75; 🕒 10am-5pm Jun-Aug, to 4.30pm Sep-May) tells the story of the navy's elite force, and has a jungle warfare display complete with live snake and scorpions.

You can also poke your nose into **Charles Dickens' Birthplace** (☎ 9282 7261; www.charlesdickensbirthplace.co.uk; 393 Old Commercial Rd; adult/child £3/1.80; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) to see where the hard-hitting author drew his first breath in 1812 and to ponder the very couch upon which he breathed his last in 1870.

Tours

Local Haunts Bus Tours (☎ 0800 389 6897; www.localhaunts.com; adult/child/student £6.50/2.50/4.50; 🕒 Mar-Oct) Runs 1½-hour sightseeing tours on old Routemaster buses from the bus station.

Walking tours (adult/child £3/free; 🕒 tours 2.30pm) A wide range of themed tours is operated through the tourist office, which also rents out self-guided audio tours for £5.

Waterbus (☎ 07746 628169; Gunwharf Quays; complete circuit adult/child £5/3, one stop only £1/50p) Runs circular harbour tours on the water, dropping off passengers between attractions in the process. The whole circuit takes one hour.

Sleeping

Most B&Bs are in Southsea. Centrally located spots fill up quickly so book ahead.

Southsea Backpackers Lodge (☎ 9283 2495; www.portsmouthbackpackers.co.uk; 4 Florence Rd, Southsea; dm/d £13/30; 🅿 💻) This grungy but friendly hostel with no-frills rooms packs three score beds into four- to eight-bed dorms, and has plenty of extras facilities such as lockers, pool table and garden. Bike storage is available.

Sally Port Inn (☎ 9282 1860; High St, Old Portsmouth; s/d/f £45/65/75; 🚭) If history makes you happy, and you don't mind a few shared facilities or mildly musty rooms, this creaky 16th-century inn has slanting floors, beams scavenged from ships and a Georgian cantilever staircase built with a ship's mast. The comfortable bar below serves food and there's a pay-and-display car park close by.

Holiday Inn Express (☎ 0870 417 6161; www.hiexpress.com; The Plaza, Gunwharf Quays; r Mon-Thu/Fri-Sun £60/99; 🅿 ❄ 💻 ♿) The location has it. Part of Gunwharf Quays shopping city, within stumbling distance of restaurants and bars, and spitting distance from the Spinnaker Tower, this spotlessly bland chain cuts a few corners (no cooked breakfasts or restaurant here) but still wins hands down for convenience.

Florence House Hotel (☎ 9275 1666; www.florencehousehotel.co.uk; 2 Malvern Rd, Southsea; d £70-90; 🅿 🚭 wi-fi) One of the city's most stylish boutique hotels is in this lovingly restored Edwardian house, studded with original features that sit comfortably amid contemporary décor. Bedrooms vary from chaste Victorian to ultramodern, and feature designer bathrooms with blissful power shower.

Eating

Southsea has the best eating options.

Sallyport Tea Rooms (☎ 9281 6265; 35 Broad St, the Point; breakfasts £3.75-5.25, lunches £3-5; 🕒 10am-5pm) Just as a traditional teashop should be: homely, civilised, filled with fussy collectibles and serving up loose-leaf speciality teas and other old-fashioned tearoom delights to the strains of 1940s jazz.

Wanted Bar & Restaurant (☎ 9282 6858; 39 Osborne Rd, Southsea; mains £6-10, 3-course set meal £21.95; 🕒 11am-11pm) This swish restaurant-bar boasts an inventive menu and a sleek minimalist vibe, featuring an illuminated wall of bottle bases and a light soundtrack of chill-out acoustics.

Lemon Sole (☎ 9281 1303; 123 High St, Old Portsmouth; mains £9.50-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A colourful little pick-your-own seafood restaurant, Lemon Sole lets you size up freshly netted critters at a counter, then choose how you want it cooked. It's in an attractive period building near the Point and has a cellar bar below.

Bistro Montparnasse (☎ 9281 6754; 103 Palmerston Rd, Southsea; 2-/3-course lunch £14.50/17.50, dinner £22.50/27.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This classy but cosy bistro serves zesty French dishes with an English twist amid chic décor and polished wood floors.

Drinking

For a taste of modern Portsmouth, pick your way through the rows of bars and trendy terraced and balconied eateries that line the Gunwharf Quays.

Still & West (☎ 9282 1567; 2 Bath Sq) This relaxed salty-dogs pub on the Point has served many a sailor and smuggler in its day, and is still great for a drink on its waterside terrace, watching the passing yachts and ferries, and looking back toward the Spinnaker Tower.

Drift (☎ 9277 9839; www.driftbar.com; 78 Palmerston Rd; 🕒 9pm-3am) This hip London-style bar languishes behind whirlpool frosted glass and pebble-dashed front, has a slick chrome and wood interior, and lounge showcasing DJs on the weekends. Be sure to visit the quirky ultracool bathrooms.

Getting There & Away

Portsmouth is 75 miles southwest of London.

BOAT

There are several ways to reach the Isle of Wight from Portsmouth (see p223 for details).

P&O Ferries (☎ 0870 598 0333; www.poferries.com) sails twice a week to Bilbao (around 10 hours) in Spain. **Brittany Ferries** (☎ 0870 366 5333; www.brittanyferries.co.uk) has overnight services to St Malo (10¾ hours), Caen (5½ hours) and Cherbourg (three hours) in France. **Acciona Transmediterranea** (☎ 0871 720 6445; www.trasmediterranea.es) sails to Bilbao several times weekly, and **LD Lines** (☎ 0870 428 4335; www.ldlines.co.uk) has daily overnight ferries to Le Havre (8½ hours) in France. **Condor Ferries** (☎ 0870 243 5140; www.condorferries.co.uk) runs a weekly car-and-passenger service to Cherbourg (5½ hours).

For prices and more information, check the websites. The Continental Ferryport is north of the Historic Dockyard.

BUS

There are 15 National Express buses from London (£13.90, 2½ hours) daily, some via Heathrow airport (£13.90, 2¾ hours) and continuing to Southampton (50 minutes). Bus 700 runs to Chichester (one hour) and to Brighton (3½ hours) half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday.

TRAIN

There are trains every 10 minutes or so from London Victoria (£23, two hours 20 minutes) and Waterloo stations (£23, one hour 40 minutes). Trains also go to Southampton (£7.10, 40 to 55 minutes), Brighton (£13.80, one hour 40 minutes, hourly), Winchester (£7.90, one hour, hourly) and Chichester (£5.30, 30 to 46 minutes, two hourly).

For the Historic Dockyard get off at the final stop, Portsmouth Harbour.

Getting Around

Bus 6 operates between the Portsmouth Harbour bus station and South Parade Pier in Southsea via Old Portsmouth.

The **Gosport Ferry** (☎ 9252 4551; www.gosportferry.co.uk; £1.80 return, bicycles travel free) shuttles back and forth between the Hard and Gosport every 10 to 15 minutes.

For a taxi try **Aquacars** (☎ 9261 1111, 9278 7666) in Southsea. There's also a taxi stand near the bus station.

Waterbus (p217) boats will drop you between Gunwharf Quays and Old Portsmouth for £1/50p per adult/child.

SOUTHAMPTON

☎ 023 / pop 234,224

This down-to-business port city and gateway to the Isle of Wight has a long and eventful past thanks to its position on the Solent, an 8-mile inlet into which flow the Rivers Itchen and Test. However, Southampton's history does not always make happy reading. While the city was once a flourishing medieval trading centre, its centre was gutted by merciless bombing in WWII and consequently there's little left of its early heritage. The city's gritty waterfront is also the point from which the *Titanic* set sail on its ill-fated voyage in 1912, and larger-than-life ocean liners such as the *QEII* still dock on the waterfront.

The **tourist office** (☎ 8083 3333; www.visit-southampton.co.uk; 9 Civic Centre Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10.30am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) has details of accommodation and guided walks.

Sights & Activities

The city's top attraction is **Southampton Art Gallery** (☎ 8083 2277; www.southampton.gov.uk/art; Commercial Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun), in the colossal Civic Centre opposite the tourist office. The collection is spaced through airy surrounds and features the best of 20th-century British art, including work by Stanley Spencer, JMW Turner and Gainsborough.

A boxy little 14th-century warehouse on the waterfront now houses the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 8022 3941; Wool House, Town Quay; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sat year-round, to 4pm Sun Apr-Oct), which tells the tragic story of the *Titanic*, as well as running through Southampton's port history since 1838. The building was once used as a prison, and has an impressive timber roof upon which inmates carved their names.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Southampton International Airport (☎ 0870 040 0009; www.southamptonairport.com) has flights to around 40 destinations in the UK and Europe, including Amsterdam, Paris, Dublin and holiday resorts in Spain. There are five trains hourly between the airport and the main train station (seven minutes).

BOAT

Red Funnel (☎ 0870 444 8898; www.redfunnel.co.uk) runs regular passenger and car ferries to the Isle of Wight and there is a ferry service to Hythe in the New Forest.

BUS

National Express coaches run to London and Heathrow 16 times per day (£13.40, 2½ hours). It also runs a 6.50pm bus to Lymington (40 minutes) via Lyndhurst (20 minutes) in the New Forest.

Bus M4 runs to Portsmouth three times daily (40 minutes). Bus 32 runs to Winchester (30 minutes) approximately hourly, with reduced services on Sunday. Bus 56/56A goes to all the main towns in the New Forest hourly (departures every two hours on Sunday). When boarding buses, ask about the good-value Explorer tickets valid on these route.

TRAIN

Trains to Portsmouth run twice hourly (£7.10, 46 to 59 minutes) and to Winchester (15 to 23 minutes) every 20 minutes.

NEW FOREST

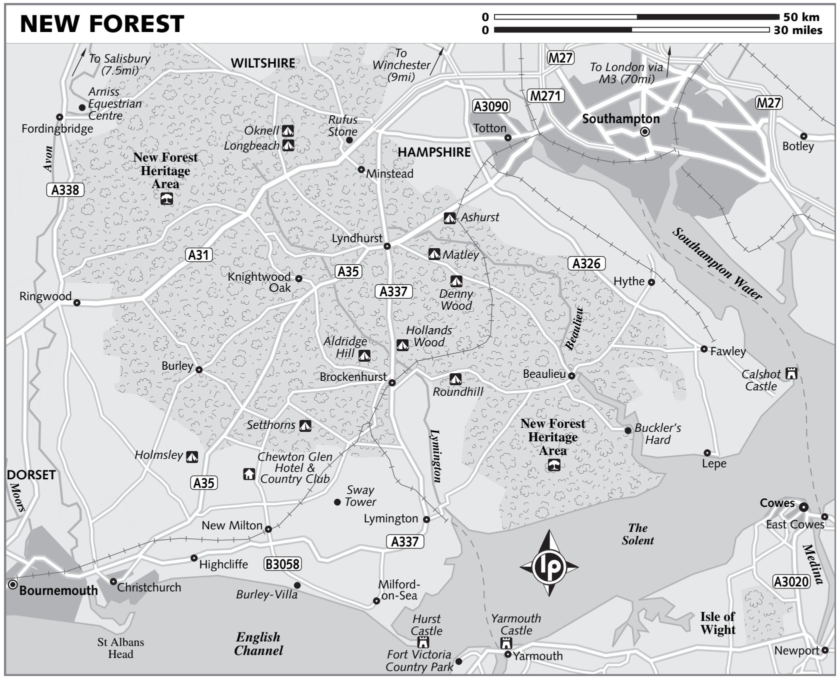
The only thing new about this ancient swathe of wild heath and woodland is its status of National Park, finalised in 2005. It's a unique place, with an even more singular history and archaic traditions that date back almost 1000 years (see the boxed text, p220), but more than that it's a joy to explore. Wild ponies mooch around its picturesque scrubland, paying no attention to the walkers and cyclists that pant past. Deer flicker in the distance and rare birds flit among the foliage. A scattering of genteel villages dot the landscape and a web of walking and cycling trails connects them.

The park is also a hugely popular destination for campers, and Lyndhurst's tourist office has a free brochure detailing its many designated camping areas. For more information, go to www.thenewforest.co.uk.

Activities

CYCLING

This is an ideal spot for two-wheel explorations and there are several rental shops. You


NEW FOREST
0 50 km
0 30 miles
To Salisbury (7.5mi)
WILTSHIRE
To Winchester (9mi)
M27
To London via M3 (70mi)
M271
A3090
M27
Arniss Equestrian Centre
Fordingbridge
Oknell
Longbeach
Rufus Stone
Totton
Southampton
Botley
HAMPSHIRE
Minstead
Avon
New Forest Heritage Area
A338
Ashurst
Southampton Water
Lyndhurst
A31
Matley
A326
Knightwood Oak
A35
A337
Hythe
Denny Wood
Ringwood
Hollands Wood
Aldridge Hill
Beaulieu
Fawley
Burley
Brockenhurst
Beaulieu
Calshot Castle
Roundhill
Setthorns
New Forest Heritage Area
Buckler's Hard
Holmsley
Chewton Glen Hotel & Country Club
Lymington
Lepe
DORSET
A35
Moors
Sway Tower
Cowes
East Cowes
New Milton
Lymington
The Solent
A337
Medina
Highcliffe
B3058
A3020
Bournemouth
Christchurch
Burley-Villa
Milford-on-Sea
Hurst Castle
Yarmouth Castle
Isle of Wight
St Albans Head
English Channel
Fort Victoria Country Park
Yarmouth
Newport

VERDERERS, AGISTERS & PONIES

The New Forest is the only area of England to remain relatively untouched since Norman times, thanks in large part to its unsuitability as agricultural land. If the presence of so much unfenced territory is remarkable enough, what is fascinating about the New Forest is that it still retains a code of law handed down during the reign of William the Conqueror.

William officially declared the whole area a royal hunting preserve in 1079, thereby protecting it from development. The crown still owns 100 sq miles of the New Forest, while the remaining 50 sq miles are owned by verderers, or commoners, who in the past reared wild ponies as work horses. Today the ponies are mostly left to graze the land at will.

The verderers' status is still protected by the 1077 Commoners' Charter, and every year, they elect five agisters, who are responsible for the daily management of area's ponies, cattle, donkeys, pigs and sheep.

will need to pay a deposit (usually £20) and provide identification.

AA Bike Hire (☎ 023-8028 3349; www.aabikehirenewforest.co.uk; Fern Glen, Gosport Lane, Lyndhurst; adult/child per day £10/5)

Country Lanes (☎ 01590-622627; www.countrylanes.co.uk; Train Station, Brockenhurst; bike/tandem per day £14/25; 🕒 Easter-Oct)

Cyclexperience (☎ 01590-624204; www.cyclex.co.uk; Brookley Rd, Brockenhurst; per half-/full day from £6.50/11)

Forest Leisure Cycling (☎ 01425-403584; www.forestleisurecycling.co.uk; the Cross, Village Centre, Burley; per day from £11)

HORSE RIDING

No, we're *not* talking about saddling up one of the wild ponies. But nonetheless riding is a wonderful way to roam the New Forest. The following stables can arrange rides, and welcome beginners:

Arniss Equestrian Centre (☎ 01425-654114; Godshill, Fordingbridge)

Burley-Villa (Western Riding; ☎ 01425-610278) It's off the B3058, just south of New Milton.

Getting There & Around

Southampton and Bournemouth bracket the New Forest and there are regular bus services from both. Trains run every half-hour to Brockenhurst from London Waterloo station (£29.50, 1½ hours) via Winchester (£8, 31 minutes) and on to Bournemouth (£5, 15 to 27 minutes). Local trains also link Brockenhurst with Lymington.

The **New Forest Tour Bus** (www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £9/4.50; 🕒 tours hourly 10am-4pm Jun-Aug) runs two-hour hop-on hop-off bus tours that pass through Lyndhurst main car park, Brockenhurst Station, Lymington and Beaulieu; it also has a cycle trailer to rest tired legs.

Busabout tickets offer unlimited travel on main bus lines in the region for seven days and cost £25/16 per adult/child; details are on www.wdbus.co.uk, along with local timetables.

LYNDHURST

☎ 023 / pop 2281

A good base from which to explore the national park or simply stop off for a pint, a cuppa or a map, the quaint little country village of Lyndhurst is one of the larger settlements in the area and has an excellent tourist office, good facilities and several cosy pubs and restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 8028 2269; www.thenewforest.co.uk; High St; 🕒 10am-5pm) sells a wide variety of information on the New Forest, including cycling maps, a map showing walking tracks, and a free camping and caravanning guide. It also sells the Ordnance Survey (OS) map (No 22, £7.49), which covers the area in greatest detail. In the same building, the informative **New Forest Museum** (☎ 8028 3444; www.newforestmuseum.org.uk; adult £3) runs through the unique ecology and social history of the region.

Just across the car park, the **library** (☎ 8028 2675; 🕒 10am-1pm Fri & Sat, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue, 3-5pm Wed) has free internet access.

Sleeping & Eating

Forest Cottage (☎ 8028 3461; www.forestcottage.co.uk; High St; s/d £28/50; 🅿 🚭) A cosy little 300-year-old cottage perched at the far end of High St, but just a two-minute walk from the centre, this wholesome B&B lets you relax into the country mind-set with inviting rooms, a library of natural history and pretty garden.

Crown Hotel (☎ 8028 2922; www.crownhotel-lyndhurst.co.uk; High St; s/d £87.50/145; 🅿 🚭 💻) An old English country house with mullioned windows and creaky staircases now hosts this reliable hotel, with pleasant enough if slightly fuddy-duddy décor, teddy bears on the beds and pleasant professional service.

Le Poussin@Parkhill (☎ 8028 2944; www.lepoussin.co.uk; Beaulieu Rd; set lunch £15-20, 4-course dinner £35) The self-taught Michelin-starred chef at this superb restaurant and hotel uses the freshest organic and local foods to orgasmic effect, and the classy rooms (£70) overlook its own private park. It also has a beautiful former royal hunting lodge near Brockenhurst at Whitley Ridge.

Getting There & Away

Buses 56 and 56a run twice hourly to Southampton (34 minutes) daily except Sunday. Lyndhurst has no train station, and the nearest stop is Brockenhurst, 8 miles south, see opposite.

White Horse Ferries (☎ 8084 0722; www.hytheferry.co.uk) operates a service from Southampton to Hythe, 13 miles southwest of Lyndhurst, every half-hour (£4 off-peak return, 12 minutes).

AROUND LYNDHURST

Rev-heads, historians and ghost-hunters all gravitate to **Beaulieu** (☎ 01590-612345; www.beaulieu.co.uk; adult/child £15/7.75; 🕒 10am-6pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr), pronounced bewley, a tourist complex based around the site of what was once England's most important 13th-century Cistercian monastery. Following Henry VIII's monastic land-grab of 1536, the abbey fell to the ancestors of current proprietors, the Montague family.

Moto-maniacs will be in clover at Lord Montague's **National Motor Museum**, but you don't need to be one to enjoy the comedy or sheer glossy splendour of its vehicles, which come in every shape and size. Some will even leave you wondering if they really are cars, or strange hybrid planes, boats or metal bubbles with wheels. It's hard to resist the romance of the early classics, or the oomph of winning F1 cars. Here too are several jet-powered land-speed record breakers including *Bluebird*, which famously broke the record (403mph, or 649km/h) in 1964. There is even a large collection of celebrity bangers such as Mr Bean's Austin Mini and James Bond's whizz-bang speed machines. Outside you can hop aboard a veteran bus from 1912, or settle down for racing games in the PS2 computer area.

Beaulieu's grand but indefinably homely **Palace** began life as a 14th-century Gothic abbey gatehouse, but received a 19th-century Scottish Baronial makeover from Baron Montague in the 1860s. Around the corner, an exhibit in the 13th-century **abbey** walks visitors through everyday life in the monastery. If you hear eerie Gregorian chanting or feel the hairs on the back of your neck quiver, you won't be surprised to learn the abbey is supposedly one of England's most haunted buildings.

The New Forest Tour Bus stops directly outside the complex on its circular route via Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Lymington. You can also get here from Lymington (35 minutes) by catching bus 112 which continues to Hythe and the ferry to Southampton.

LYMINGTON

☎ 01590 / pop 14,227

The bustling little harbour town of Lymington has several strings to its tourism bow, being not only a popular yachting base with two marinas freckled with fibreglass floaters, but also a handy base for the New Forest and a

WORTH THE TRIP

Unquestionably one of the top hotel-spas in Britain (some say Europe or even the world), five-star **Chewton Glen Hotel & Country Club** (☎ 01425-275341; www.chewtonglen.com; r from £290; 🅿 🚭 💻 🏊) lives up to every one of its rave reviews. A country house in sprawling grounds, with a croquet lawn and golf course that seem snipped by nail scissors, the building itself is filled with character and antiques. The staff is programmed to anticipate every need before you've even realised them, the sophisticated rooms and facilities astound and the superb Marryat restaurant has won many a plaudit on its own merits. Enough superlatives already? Well we've one more reserved for the hotel spa, which is the absolute epitome of luxury.

Chewton is situated a mile north of New Milton village, in the southern reaches of the New Forest.

jumping-off point to the Isle of Wight. It's a pleasing Georgian town with a few cobbled streets and a range of quirky bookshops, inns and nautical stores.

Information

Free internet can be arranged at Lymington's main **library** (☎ 673050; North Close; 🕘 9.30am-7pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Wed, 9.30am-5pm Sat), a few blocks from Lymington Town train station.

Lymington Laundrette (☎ 672898; 11 New St; 🕘 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is on hand to make hiking gear smell sweet again; it's next door to the tourist office.

ATMs, banks and shops line the Georgian and Victorian High St. There's a post office at the end of High St near St Thomas Church.

The **tourist office** (☎ 689000; www.thenewforest.co.uk; New St; 🕘 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a block off High St next to the museum, sells walking tours of town and will help you find accommodation.

Sights

Lymington was once known as a contrabandist port, and you can learn about the local smugglers, salt makers and yachties in **St Barbe Museum** (☎ 676969; www.stbarbe-museum.org.uk; New St; adult/child £3/2; 🕘 10am-4pm Mon-Sat).

Sleeping & Eating

Angel Inn (☎ 672050; www.roomattheinn.co.uk; 108 High St; r Mon-Thu/Fri-Sun £44.95/79.95; P 🚭) Striking a fair balance between traditional and modern, this boutique hotel in a renovated Georgian coaching inn features clean, warmly decorated and woody rooms and a cosily lit and imaginative bistro downstairs.

Wistaria (☎ 688090; www.wistaria.org.uk; St Thomas St; mains £11-20; 🕘 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Festooned with flowering wisteria, this converted Georgian town house was formerly a doctor's surgery, and is now an airily elegant eatery with fawning service and exquisite seasonal food. It also offers three sumptuously decorated top-end rooms (single/double £95/120). It's 200m up High St from the Angel Inn.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is just off High St. Lymington has two train stations: Lymington Town and Lymington Pier; the latter is where the Isle of Wight ferry drops off and picks up. Trains to Southampton (£7.80, 45 minutes) via Brockenhurst leave every half-hour.

Wightlink Ferries (☎ 0870 582 7744; www.wightlink.co.uk) cross to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight every half-hour costing £10/45.60 return for foot passenger/cars (30 minutes).

ISLE OF WIGHT

This lovely island, just a few miles off the Hampshire coast, does its utmost to bottle traditional childhood-holiday nostalgia and sell it. A popular escape for yachties, cyclists, walkers and the bucket-and-spade brigade since Victorian times, it alternates between chocolate-box quaint and crazy-golf kitsch, rosy-cheeked activity and rural respite. But the last few years have also seen a fresh youthful buzz injecting life into its southern resort towns, attracting a new generation of urbanites and romantic weekenders with gastropubs, slick hotels and big music festivals. Still, the island's principal appeal is its surprisingly mild climate, its myriad outdoorsy activities and its lush green hills that roll gently down to 25 miles of clean, unspoilt beaches.

For good online information, check out www.islandbreaks.co.uk.

Activities

CYCLING

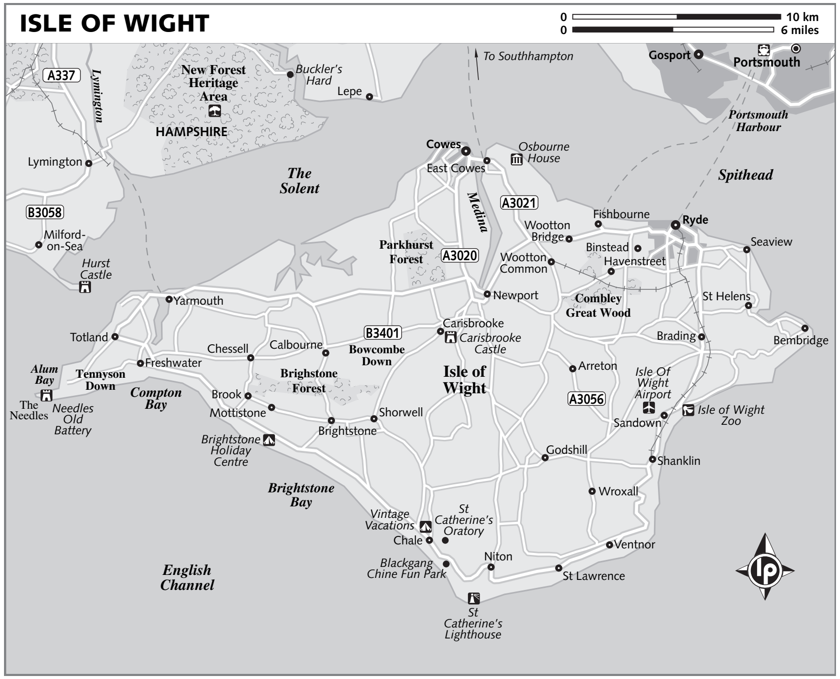
Cyclists will be in clover here. There is a 62-mile cycleway, and the island has its own **Cycling Festival** (☎ 01983-203891; www.sunseaandcycling.com) every September.

Bike rentals are available all over the island for around £10 to £15 per day or £45 per week. Companies include the following:

Extreme Cycles (☎ 01983-852232; www.extremecycles.co.uk; Church St, Ventnor)
Island Pedal Power (☎ 01983-292665; www.islandpedalpower.co.uk; 5-7 York St, Cowes) There's also an outlet at Brading train station.
Tavcycles (☎ 01983-812989; www.tavcycles.co.uk; 140 High St, Ryde)
Wavells (☎ 01983-760738; The Square, Yarmouth)
Wight Cycle Hire (☎ 01983-731888; www.wightcyclehire.co.uk; Calbourne) Offers delivery and collection across the island.

WALKING

This is one of the best spots in southern England for gentle rambling. Walkers can pick and choose their way via an impressive 500 miles of well-marked walking paths through lush green landscapes and coastal routes. The island's annual **Walking Festival** (☎ 813818; www.isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk & www.walkthewight.org.uk) is fêted as the largest in the UK, and takes place over two weeks in May. Tourist offices have trail pamphlets from £3.


ISLE OF WIGHT
0 10 km
0 6 miles
To Southhampton
Gosport
Portsmouth
Portsmouth Harbour
Spithead
A337
Lymington
New Forest Heritage Area
Buckler's Hard
Lepe
HAMPSHIRE
Lymington
B3058
Milford-on-Sea
Hurst Castle
The Solent
Cowes
East Cowes
Osbourne House
Medina
A3021
Fishbourne
Ryde
Seaview
Wootton Bridge
Binstead
Havenstreet
Wootton Common
Parkhurst Forest
A3020
Newport
Combley Great Wood
St Helens
Yarmouth
Totland
Carisbrooke
Carisbrooke Castle
B3401
Brading
Bembridge
Chessell
Calbourne
Bowcombe Down
Freshwater
Alum Bay
Tennyson Down
Compton Bay
Brighstone Forest
Isle of Wight
Arreton
Isle Of Wight Airport
A3056
Isle of Wight Zoo
The Needles
Needles Old Battery
Brook
Mottistone
Shorwell
Brightstone
Sandown
Brightstone Holiday Centre
Godshill
Shanklin
Brightstone Bay
Wroxall
Vintage Vacations
St Catherine's Oratory
Chale
Ventnor
Niton
Blackgang Chine Fun Park
St Lawrence
English Channel
St Catherine's Lighthouse

Getting There & Away

Wightlink (☎ 0870 5827744; www.wightlink.co.uk) operates a passenger ferry from the Hard in Portsmouth to Ryde pier (15 minutes) and a car-and-passenger ferry (35 minutes) to Fishbourne. Both ferries run about every half-hour (£11 day return). Car fares start at £47 for a short-break return.

The Wightlink car ferry between Lymington and Yarmouth costs £10 per day return for passengers and from £45.60 for cars (30 minutes, every half-hour). Children travel for half price.

Hovertravel (☎ 01983-811000; www.hovertravel.co.uk) hovercrafts zoom back and forth between Southsea (near Portsmouth) and Ryde (£10.70 per day return, 10 minutes).

Red Funnel (☎ 0870 444 8898; www.redfunnel.co.uk) operates car ferries between Southampton and East Cowes (£10.50 return, from £40 with car, 55 minutes) and high-speed passenger ferries between Southampton and West Cowes (£10/12.60 one way/return, 22 minutes). It also runs combined deals including admission to island attractions: see the website for details.

Getting Around

Southern Vectis (☎ 532373; www.islandbuses.info) runs relatively comprehensive bus services around the island. Only the remote southwest side between Blackgang Chine and Brook does not receive regular services. Buses run between the eastern towns approximately every 30 minutes. **Stagecoach Island Line** (www.island-line.com) runs trains twice hourly from Ryde to Shanklin (25 minutes) and the **Isle of Wight Steam Railway** (☎ 884343; www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk; 🕘 May-Sep) branches off from this line at Smallbrook Junction and goes to Wootton (adult/child £8.50/5.50, 1st class £12.50/8.50).

Rover Tickets give you unlimited use of buses and trains for £9 for a day, £16 for two days and £35 for a week.

COWES

☎ 01983

This hilly Georgian harbour town on the island's northern tip is famous for **Cowes Week** (www.skandiacowesweek.co.uk), one of the longest-running and biggest annual sailing regattas in the world. Started in 1826, the regatta still sails with more gusto than ever in late July or early August. Lopped into two by the River Medina, the town's long waterfronts are fringed by fibreglass toys and vintage sailboats.

The **tourist office** (☎ 813818; Fountain Quay; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter) can point you towards local attractions and a rather dry (no pun intended) maritime museum.

Most people simply head for the right-royal hideaway of Queen Victoria, **Osborne House** (EH; ☎ 200022, 281784; East Cowes; adult/child £9.50/4.80; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep), which is the kind of lemon-frosted confection of pomp that only the Victorian era knew how to execute. Built between 1845 and 1851, it's the island's top attraction. Queen Victoria grieved here for many years after the death of her husband, and died here in 1901. There are some obscenely extravagant rooms, notably the stunning Durbar Room, and the gardens have a delightful Swiss Cottage where the royal ankle biters would play.

The house is across the River Medina from West Cowes; a chain ferry crosses regularly. From October to March it opens from 10am to 4pm Sunday to Thursday for guided tours only.

Sleeping & Eating

Halcyone Villa (☎ 291334; Grove Rd, West Cowes; s £22.50-40, d £45-70; 🅿 🚭) You'll be made to feel right at home in this family-run B&B a short walk from the centre of town. It's an unpretentious but very clean spot with shared bathroom but in-room sink.

Fountain (☎ 292397; www.fountaininn-cowes.com; High St, West Cowes; s/d £65/90) This classic old pub has a handful of neatly kept rooms with modern amenities, CD players and en suite, and serves enormous portions of food (mains £6.50 to £9) as well as a good pint in its downstairs bar.

NEWPORT & AROUND

The capital of the Isle of Wight, rambling Newport has little for holidaymakers except for nearby **Carisbrooke Castle** (EH; ☎ 522107; adult/child £5.50/2.80; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). An oft-repeated local saying states that whoever controlled Carisbrooke also controlled the island. As you scramble around the sturdy ramparts of this medieval castle, spare a thought for the unfortunate Charles I, who was imprisoned here before his execution in 1649. Kids adore the Carisbrooke donkeys, which still draw water from a well using a treadmill.

RYDE

☎ 01983

The nippiest foot-passenger ferries to Wight alight here in this none-too-charming Victorian town with its tacky seafront arcades and workaday atmosphere. There is a **tourist office** (☎ 813818; 81-83 Union St; 🕒 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) to help you get oriented and track down accommodation or transport.

Ryde Castle (☎ 563755; www.rydecastle.com; Esplanade; d £85-100; 🅿) is one of the more characterful places to stay in Ryde. Located only a short hop from the passenger ferry, this is a grey-crenulated castle sure enough, though not quite as ancient as they may have you believe. Rooms could belong in a chain hotel.

SANDOWN & SHANKLIN

☎ 01983

The island's southeast coast is home to some of its best-known beaches, and families wielding buckets, spades and blow-up dinghies descend in their droves to the twin resort towns of Sandown and Shanklin. Once you've had your fill of candyfloss, beachside frolics and funfair rides you can also go and growl at Britain's largest collection of tigers in the sprawling **Isle of Wight Zoo** (☎ 405562; Sandown; adult/child £5.95/4.95; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Feb-Mar & Oct).

VENTNOR

☎ 01983

The Victorian town of Ventnor slaloms steeply down along the island's southern coast, and these days it's the island's creative epicentre, brimming with a new wave of quirky boutiques, musicians and artists.

Perched right on the seafront esplanade, the **Spy Glass Inn** (☎ 855338; www.thespyglass.com; The Esplanade; 2-person flats from £60) has several self-contained flats with fuddy-duddy décor but sea views; no kids allowed. The lively pub below is festooned with nautical knick-knacks.

Or for a taste of new Wight and a spot of pampering in the process, book yourself in at chintz-free boutique hotel the **Hambrough** (☎ 856333; www.thehambrough.com; d with sea view £160-200; 🅿 🚭), where chic décor, lots of natural light and sea views seal the deal. Room six even has a sea-view bath for two.

WIGHT'S OWN WOODSTOCK

The tranquil Isle of Wight is commonly described as 'England, only a few decades ago', making reference to its genteel traditions and largely unspoilt charm. But the last few years have seen an altogether different revival of past decades. For this island was the once the setting for a series of infamous rock festivals that burned short but bright from 1968 to 1970.

The final festival is the stuff of rock legend: an incredible 600,000 doped-up hippies gathered here to see the likes of The Doors, The Who, Joni Mitchell and – most famously – the last performance of rock icon Jimi Hendrix. He was to die less than three weeks later, aged just 27. The festival also bit the dust in the same year after a bunch of the so-called love children ran amok; the incident led to an 'Isle of Wight' Act being passed in parliament, and all gatherings of more than 10,000 people were henceforth banned.

But the 2000s have recently seen a rekindling of the island's revolutionary festivals, which are fast growing into some of England's top music events. The new generation of **Isle of Wight Festivals** (www.isleofwightfestival.com), held in mid-June, has already been headlined by the likes of REM and Coldplay, while dance-oriented newborn **Bestival** (www.bestival.net), in mid-September, has seen the Pet Shop Boys, Scissor Sisters and more.

SOUTH WIGHT

The southernmost point of the island is marked by sturdy mid-19th-century **St Catherine's Lighthouse**. Far more exciting for visitors, however, is the stone rocket-ship lookalike, **St Catherine's Oratory**. This odd construction is a lighthouse dating from 1314 and marks the highest point on the island.

You'll find something for the kids a couple of miles further west at **Blackgang Chine Fun Park** (☎ 01983-730052; www.blackgangchine.com; 4yr & up £8.50; 🕒 10am-10pm mid-Jul–Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-early Jul, Sep & Oct), a Victorian landscaped garden–turned–theme park with water gardens, animated shows and a hedge maze.

Slightly further west, a dairy farm hosts the glorious hippy-throwback **Vintage Vacations** (☎ 07802-758113; www.vintagevacations.co.uk; Chale; 4-person caravans per weekend £135-165, per week £315-425; 🅿 🚭), which rents out four 1960s dazzling-aluminium Airstream trailers from California; they've been lovingly refitted with retro furnishings. Flower-power two-man tents can also be hired for £20 per night. Camping has never been so cool.

WEST WIGHT

The island's southwestern corner is its most remote, with bumpy scenic drives past sheep and cattle farms, thatched farmhouses and secluded beaches. The most stunning stretch of cliffs is on its western tip, also home to the most famous chunks of chalk in the region: the **Needles**. These jagged white rocks rise shardlike out of the sea, forming a perfect line like the backbone of a prehistoric sea monster.

Here too you'll find the military **Needles Old Battery** (NT; ☎ 01983-754772; admission £3.90; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct), a fort established in 1862 and used as an observation post during WWII. There's a 60m tunnel through the cliff to a searchlight lookout.

You can get to the point by a 1-mile clifftop walk from Alum Bay or hold out for one of the tourist buses that run between bay and battery hourly, or twice hourly in July and August.

In Alum Bay you'll also find the happy hullabaloo of kiddies rides, boat trips and souvenir shops at the **Needles Park** (☎ 0870 458 0022; www.theneedles.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am-dusk Apr-Nov), which also has a chairlift down to the beach and a sweet factory with demonstrations of how its teeth-rotting treats are made. There are fireworks nightly in August.

Sleeping

Totland Bay YHA (☎ 0870 770 6070; totland@yha.org.uk; Hirst Hill, Totland; dm £10.95; 🅿 🚭) A large, marvellous Victorian house overlooking the water, with mostly family-oriented dorms and a maximum of eight beds per room.

Brighstone Holiday Centre (☎ 01983-740244; www.brighstone-holidays.co.uk; tents 2/4 persons £12/18, caravans from £16, B&B adult/child £25/13, 2-person cabins per week from £230; 🅿 🏊) Long-time family favourite, this self-contained caravan and cabin park and B&B perches atop cliffs overlooking a stunning stretch of coastline. It's located on the A3055, 6 miles east of Freshwater.

WEST SUSSEX

Serene West Sussex comes as a little light relief after the faster-paced adventures of Brighton and East Sussex. The tumbling hills and valleys of the South Downs dominate the countryside. And both dreamy Arundel and dignified big sister Chichester make good bases from which to explore the county's winding country lanes and scout out its remarkable Roman ruins.

ARUNDEL

☎ 01903 / pop 3297

There's something irresistibly romantic about Arundel: this attractive little town with its vast fairy-tale castle and steep hillside streets lined with excellent restaurants and antique stores makes a great weekend break or stopover. While much of the town appears medieval – especially the whimsical castle that has been home to the dukes of Norfolk for centuries – most of it dates to Victorian times.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 882268; www.sussexbythesea.com; 61 High St; 🕓 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-3pm Nov-Easter) has maps and an accommodation-booking service for £1.50. Here too is a small **museum** (☎ 885708; www.arundelmuseum.org; adult/child £2/1) on Arundel's history.

Sights & Activities

The 18th- and 19th-century English gentry were famously fond of a good folly, but you'll see few more elaborate than **Arundel Castle** (☎ 883136; www.arundelcastle.org; adult/under 16yr/student & senior £12/7.50/9.50; 🕓 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Apr-Oct), which builds upon the altogether more modest remains of an 11th-century keep in its heart. The original castle was largely razed during the Civil War, but it was enthusiastically reconstructed to heroic proportions by the eighth, 11th and 15th dukes of Norfolk between 1718 and 1900. The castle is still home to the current duke. Highlights include the atmospheric keep, the massive Great Hall and the library, which has paintings by Gainsborough and Holbein.

While you're here, take a quick tour of Arundel's ostentatious 19th-century **cathedral** (☎ 882297; www.arundelcathedral.org; 🕓 9am-6pm summer, to dusk winter), built in the French Gothic style by the 15th duke. It houses the remains of his ancestor, St Philip Howard, now a canonised Catholic martyr who was caught praying for a Spanish victory against the English in 1588.

At the foot of High St is the Town Quay, from where you can hire your own boat or hop on a **cruise** (adult/child £6/4) of the River Arun.

Sleeping

Arundel YHA (☎ 0870 770 5676; arundel@yha.org.uk; Warningcamp; dm £15; P ☒ 💻) Muddy boots and young families are welcome at this excellent hostel, housed in a Georgian mansion and principally catering to South Downs walkers. It's in sprawling grassy grounds on a charming country lane a 20- to 30-minute walk from town off the A27 (call for directions).

Norfolk Arms (☎ 882101; www.forestdale.com; High St; s/d from £75/125; P ☒) A rambling old Georgian coaching inn built by the 10th duke, the Norfolk Arms has a comfortable feel that resists any hint of modern pizzazz but has beautifully kept country-style rooms and a family of plastic ducks to accompany you at bathtime.

Eating

Tudor Rose (☎ 883813; 49 High St; mains £5-8; 🕓 9am-6pm) There's a likeably kitsch spirit to this bustling family-run tearoom, with shades of pub-décor and walls cluttered with everything from faux armour to brollies, and ship wheels to a portrait of the Queen. The staff is uncommonly welcoming and efficient.

WORTH THE TRIP

After cooing over majestic Arundel Castle, you might find yourself fancying a piece of that princely lifestyle pie for yourself. And hidden away in the countryside near the pretty village of Amberley, about 5 miles north of Arundel, **Amberley Castle Hotel** (☎ 831992; www.amberleycastle.co.uk; Amberley; d £165-780; P ☒) lets you convert your daydreaming into reality. Set in a 900-year-old castle complete with moat and 2-tonne oak portcullis that is lowered every night, this luxurious hotel feels anything but embattled. Rather, its 19 sumptuous rooms, Jacuzzi bathrooms, landscaped gardens complete with tennis, croquet, golf, thatched treehouse and traditional British dining will leave you feeling utterly at peace. At least until you get the credit-card bill.

Lezinc (☎ 884500; www.lezinc.co.uk; 51 High St; mains £6-10; 🕓 9.30am-7pm Fri-Wed, to 10pm Thu) Slick modern designware and silver-grey rattan furniture combine with the low ceilings and oak beams of an old town house at this chic Parisian-style bistro, where it's all too easy to linger over fine wines by the glass, great coffees or light bites including *pain Poîlane* (an unusual French bread with a slightly sour flavour) and gourmet tarts.

Town House (☎ 883847; www.thetownhouse.co.uk; 65 High St; 2-/3-course set lunch £12.50/16, set dinner £22/25; 🕓 Wed-Sat) The only thing that rivals the stunning 16th-century Florentine gilded walnut ceiling at this elegant eatery is its five wonderful Regency-style rooms (single/double from £65/75), variously furnished with white four-poster beds, filmy fabrics and panelled walls.

Getting There & Away

Trains are the way to go. They run to London Victoria (£19.70, 1½ hours, twice hourly), and to Chichester (20 minutes, twice hourly). There are also links to Brighton (£7.30, 1¼ hours, twice hourly).

CHICHESTER

☎ 01243 / pop 27,477

Compact Chichester is a well-to-do Georgian market town that manages to straddle the divide between countryside charm and cosmopolitan culture. On the one hand, it's home to an array of traditional tea-and-crumpet shops, well-mannered townsfolk, a fine cathedral and streets of handsome 18th-century town houses. While on the other, Chichester boasts a famous theatre and arts festival and a superb modern-art gallery. Also the administrative capital of West Sussex, the town is within easy striking distance of some fascinating Roman remains that recall its days as a sprawling port garrison shortly after the invasion of AD 43.

Orientation & Information

The centre of town is marked by a striking crown-shaped Market Cross, built in 1501. The streets around it are pedestrianised and everything you'd want to see is within walking distance. There is a **tourist office** (☎ 775888; www.visitchichester.org; 29a South St; 🕓 9.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 11am-3.30pm Sun Apr-Sep) and a **post office** (cnr Chapel & West Sts) in town. **Internet Junction** (☎ 776644; 2 Southdown Building, Southgate; per hr £1; 🕓 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun) has double-quick internet access.

Sights

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

A vision in clean-cut elegance, this **cathedral** (☎ 782595; www.chichestercathedral.org.uk; West St; requested donation £5; 🕓 7.15am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 6pm Sep-May) was begun in 1075 and largely rebuilt in the 13th century. Three storeys of beautiful arches sweep upwards, and Romanesque carvings are dotted around. The freestanding church tower was built in the 15th century, and the spire is 19th century. There are also a few modern flourishes, including an entrancing stained-glass window by Marc Chagall and the not-so-pretty disembodied likenesses of the Queen and Prince Phillip outside the main entrance.

Guided tours operate at 11.15am and 2.30pm Monday to Saturday, Easter to October, and the excellent cathedral choir is guaranteed to give you goose bumps during the daily **evensong** (🕓 5.30pm Mon-Sat, 3.30pm Sun).

PALLANT HOUSE GALLERY

Based in a wonderful Queen Anne town house once owned by a wealthy wine merchant, this outstanding **art gallery** (☎ 774557; www.pallant.org.uk; 9 North Pallant; adult/child/student £6.50/2/3.50; 🕓 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun) reopened with a swish new wing in 2006. It houses a superb collection of 20th-century British art, with names such as Caulfield, Freud, Sutherland and Moore represented. There are also historic works from British and international artists, from Picasso to Cézanne, Gainsborough to Rembrandt.

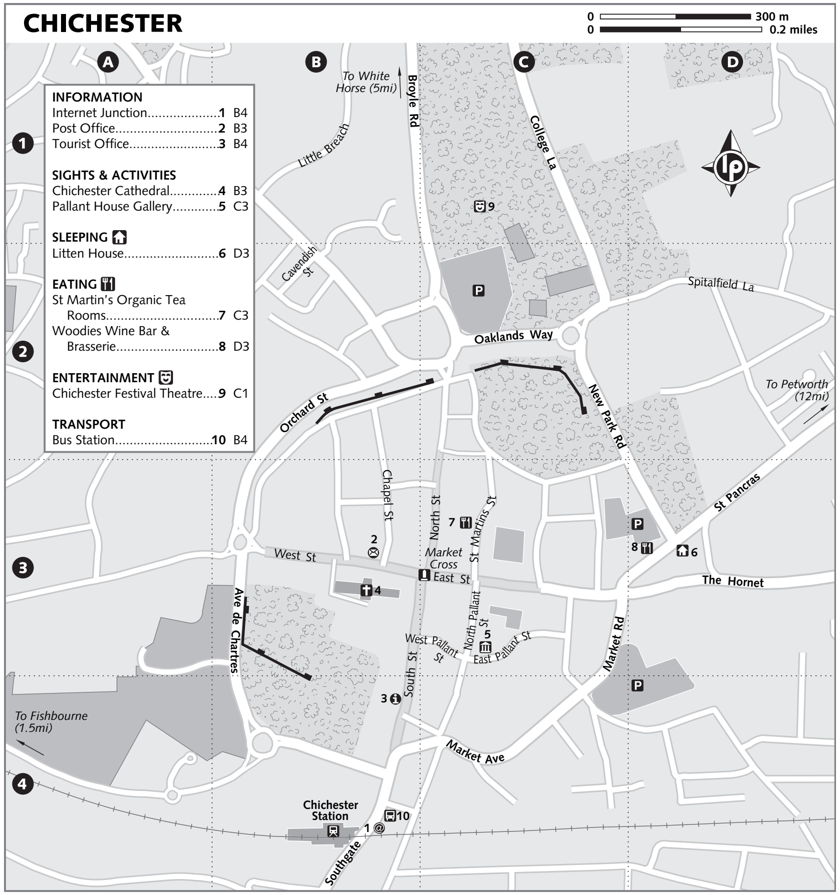
Festivals & Events

Running for more than 30 years, the annual **Chichester Festivities** (☎ 785718; www.chifest.org.uk) squeezes a wealth of terrific theatre, art, remarkably high-brow and fun low-brow speakers, fireworks and performances of virtually every musical genre into three weeks in June and July.

Sleeping

Most accommodation in Chichester is mid-range, with little for budget travellers.

Litten House (☎ 774503; www.littenho.demon.co.uk; 148 St Pancras St; s/d from £30/44; ☒) Freshly home-baked bread and jams are served for breakfast in the garden or conservatory at this disarming central Georgian town house, which has three spacious and gracious old-style rooms. Request room two for an idyllic little balcony overlooking the garden. A car park lies across the way on New St.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White Horse (☎ 535219; www.whitehorsechilgrove.co.uk; Chilgrove; s/d Mon-Thu £65/95, Fri-Sun £95/120; 🅿 🚭) For those with their own wheels, this beautiful whitewashed 18th-century coaching inn covered in wisteria is well worth the 6-mile drive north of Chichester. It has a first-rate restaurant (with a renowned 600-strong wine list) and nine polished contemporary rooms with king-sized beds, bathrobes and CD players.

Eating

St Martin's Organic Tea Rooms (☎ 786715; www.organictearooms.co.uk; 3 St Martins St; snacks £3-5; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) An oasis of quirky English calm in a part-18th-century part-medieval town house, this passionately organic café serves freshly ground coffee and wholesome fare from salmon sandwiches to Welsh rarebits. But best of all is the ambience of its low-beamed interior, snug hideaways and winter fire.

Woodies Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 779895; 10-13 St Pancras St; mains £8-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This classy but relaxed, lively but romantic restaurant has a darkly beamed front and a rustic-chic conservatory dotted with citrus trees and entwined with grapevines and fairy lights at the back. It serves quality Mediterranean food.

Entertainment

Chichester Festival Theatre (☎ 781312; www.cft.org.uk; Oakland's Park) This modern playhouse was built in 1962 and has a distinguished history. Sir Laurence Olivier was the theatre's first director and Ingrid Bergman, Sir John Gielgud and Sir Anthony Hopkins are a few of the other famous names to have taken to the stage here.

Getting There & Away

Chichester is 60 miles from London and 18 miles from Portsmouth.

BUS

Chichester is served by Coastliner bus 700, which runs every half-hour (hourly on Sunday) between Brighton (2¼ hours) and Portsmouth (one hour). National Express has a rather protracted daily service from London Victoria (£11.40, four hours).

TRAIN

Chichester can be reached easily from London Victoria (£18.50, 1¾ hours, three hourly) via Gatwick airport and Arundel. It's also on the coast line between Brighton (£9, 44 to 58 minutes) and Portsmouth (£5.30, 30 to 40 minutes). Trains run twice hourly.

AROUND CHICHESTER

Fishbourne Roman Palace & Museum

Anyone mad about mosaics should make a beeline to **Fishbourne Palace** (☎ 01243-785859; www.sussexpast.co.uk; Salthill Rd; adult/child £6.50/3.40; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Jul, Sep & Oct, to 6pm Aug, to 4pm Nov-Feb), where the largest known Roman residence in Britain is located. Mostly excavated in 1960, the once-luxurious mansion is thought to have been built around AD 75 for a Romanised local king. The modern pavilion that houses its foundations, hypocaust and painstakingly re-laid mosaics give the site a rather sterile atmosphere but the mosaics are enthralling enough to propel the visitor back in time. The centrepiece is a spectacular floor depicting Cupid riding a dolphin flanked by sea horses and panthers. There's also a fascinating little museum and replanted Roman gardens.

Fishbourne Palace is 1.5 miles west of Chichester, just off the A259. Buses 11 and 700 leave hourly from Monday to Saturday (bus 56 on Sunday) from outside Chichester Cathedral and stop at the bottom of Salthill Rd (five minutes' walk away). The museum is a 10-minute stroll from Fishbourne train station.

EAST SUSSEX

East Sussex is a richly varied county that absorbs armies of weekending Londoners whenever the weather is fine. Some come for the scintillating nightlife and shingly shores of Brighton, others to explore the white cliffs and civilised seaside charms of Eastbourne. Many more opt for romance amid the medieval streets of Rye or historic Battle, where William the Conqueror first engaged the Saxons in 1066. But you needn't chase the Chelsea tractors to enjoy East Sussex. It's just as rewarding to get off the beaten track and explore its lush countryside, linger along its winding country lanes and stretch your legs across the rolling South Downs.

RYE

☎ 01797 / pop 4195

Seemingly pickled, put on a shelf and promptly forgotten about by old Father Time, Rye is one of England's most beautiful medieval villages. You can't help but fall under its spell as you slip and wobble through the cobbled lanes, past mysterious passageways and crooked timber-beamed buildings. Romantics can lap up the townsfolk's tales of resident smugglers, ghosts, writers and artists, and even the most hardened cynic will be seduced by a slew of exquisite accommodations in its heart.

Once a coastal Cinque Port but long since abandoned by the shifting coastline, the town sits prettily atop a rocky outcrop, and sheep graze where the waters once lapped. If you do visit – and you absolutely should – try to avoid weekends during the summer, when hoards of day-trippers dilute the town's time-warp effect.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 226696; www.visitrye.co.uk; Strand Quay; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) runs a town model audiovisual history for £3. More fun is the freaky collection of penny-in-the-slot novelty machines upstairs. The tourist office also sells a *Rye Town Walk* map for £1, and rents out multilingual audio tours costing £3/1 per adult/child.

You can get online at **PC Hut** (☎ 224367; 46 Ferry Rd; per min 5p; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat). The **post office** (🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) is on Cinque Ports St.

Sights

From the tourist office, turn away from the water through Strand Quay, and clamber up the famous cobbled **Mermaid St**, thick with 15th-century timber-framed houses with quirky house names like 'The House with Two Front Doors', 'The House Opposite' and more.

Turn right at the T-junction for the Georgian **Lamb House** (NT; ☎ 229542; West St; adult/child £3/1.50; 🕒 2-6pm Thu & Sat late Mar-Oct), a handsome house supposedly home to several ghosts, but not that of its most famous resident, American writer Henry James, who lived here from 1898 to 1916; James wrote *The Wings of the Dove* here.

Continue around the dogleg into cobbled Church Sq, ringed by historic houses, including the **Friars of the Sack**, which was once part of a 13th-century Augustinian friary but is now a private home. The pretty **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) is a mishmash of medieval and later styles and its turret clock is the oldest in England (1561) still working with its original pendulum mechanism. There are great views from its **tower** (adult/child £2/free), weather permitting.

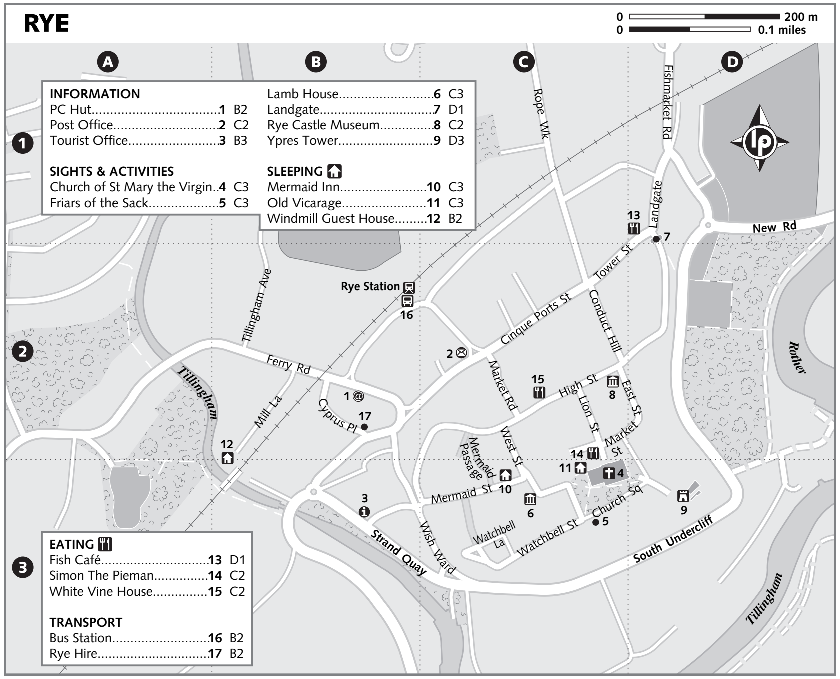
Turn right at the square's east corner for the sandcastle-archetype **Ypres Tower** (tower & museum adult/child £2.90/1.50, tower only adult/child £1.90/1; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), pronounced 'wipers'. This 13th-century building, with great views over Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, houses one part of Rye Castle Museum. It's overseen by a friendly warden fit to bust with colourful tales from the tower's history as fort, prison, mortuary and museum (the last two at overlapping times).

The other branch of the **museum** (☎ 226728; www.ryemuseum.co.uk; 3 East St; adult/child £1.90/1; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), a short stroll away on East St, is home to a 1745 fire engine made of leather and wood and other intriguing loot.

At the northeastern edge of the village, the thickset pale-stone **Landgate** dates from 1329, and is the only remaining gate out of four.

Activities

To combine history and a hearty hike, the well-signposted 31-mile **1066 Country Walk** meanders from Rye to Battle and Pevensey where it connects with the South Downs Way.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Ferry Rd
Tillingham
Mill La
Cyprus Pl
Market Rd
High St
Lion St
East St
Market St
West St
Mermaid Passage
Mermaid St
Church Sq
Watchbell La
Watchbell St
Strand Quay
Wish Ward
South Undercliff
Rother
Tillingham

Sleeping

Rye boasts an exceptional choice of unique historic accommodation.

Windmill Guest House (☎ 224027; www.ryewindmill.co.uk; Mill Lane; s/d from £30/58; 🅿 🚭) It's not every night that you sleep under the arms of a windmill, this one rebuilt in 1932 and a working bakery until 1976. This riverside mill-turned-guesthouse sits a short hop from town and its eight bedrooms (one with private bathroom) are simply decorated and trimmed with wood. It's off Ferry Rd.

Old Vicarage (☎ 222119; www.oldvicarageye.co.uk; 66 Church Sq; s/d £50/78; 🅿 🚭) This fairy-pink former vicarage is tucked discretely away on a cobbled lane. It wins intense loyalty from guests with its pretty walled garden, four prim rooms with sherry and biscuits, and superb breakfasts of homemade bread, jams and a complimentary newspaper. Children over five only.

Mermaid Inn (☎ 223065; www.mermaidinn.com; Mermaid St; d £160-220; 🅿 🚭) Few inns can claim to be as atmospheric as this ancient hostelry, dating from 1420. Every room is different – but each is thick with dark beams, lit by leaded windows and some are graced by secret passageways that now act as fire escapes. Small wonder it's a favourite spot for celebs, royals and honeymooners. But mind out for the resident ghost.

Eating & Drinking

Simon the Pieman (☎ 222207; 3 Lion St; snacks £1.50-3.50; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun) Ever-so-English Rye seems to have a pretty teashop for every occasion. This is one of the more traditional spots with calorific cream teas of freshly baked scones and simple lunches.

White Vine House (☎ 224748; www.whitevinehouse.co.uk; 24 High St; mains £7.50-11) Fine dining in a fine setting can be had at this elegant vine-covered Tudor building, with an exquisitely painted dining room and a reputation for cooking the freshest local produce. It also has pristine rooms (singles/doubles from £70/115).

Fish Café (☎ 222226; www.thefishcafe.com; 17 Tower St; mains £10-23; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A contemporary renovation of an old antiques warehouse, furnished in calm shades with chocolate high-back chairs, this restaurant focuses on its modern local fish and seafood dishes, cooked simply but to perfection.

Getting There & Away

Bus 711 runs twice hourly between Dover (two hours) and Hastings (30 minutes) via Rye. Trains run three times hourly to London Charing Cross (£20.40, two hours), but you must change either in Hastings or Ashford.

Getting Around

You can rent all-terrain bikes from £12/8 per day/four hours from **Rye Hire** (☎ 223033; ryehire@tiscali.co.uk; 1 Cyprus Pl; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). Call ahead for weekend hire.

BATTLE

☎ **01424** / **pop 5190**

A small but attractive village with a monumental place in British history, Battle grew up around the point where invading French duke William of Normandy, aka William the Conqueror, scored a decisive victory over local King Harold in 1066, so beginning Norman rule and changing the face of the country for good.

Orientation & Information

The train station is a short walk from High St, and is well signposted. The **tourist office** (☎ 773721; www.battletown.co.uk; High St; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) should be operating from a spanking new visitor centre alongside the battlefield site entrance by the time you read this. The post office, banks and ATMs are also on High St.

Sights

Another day, another photogenic ruin? Hardly. On this spot raged *the* pivotal battle in the last successful invasion of England in 1066: an event with unparalleled impact on the country's subsequent social structure, architecture and well…pretty much everything. Just four years afterwards, the conquering Normans began work on **Battle Abbey** (EH; ☎ 773792; adult/child £6.30/3.20; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar), smack in the middle of the battlefield: a penance ordered by the Pope for the loss of life incurred here.

Only the foundations of the original church remain, the altar's position marked by a plaque also supposedly the spot England's King Harold famously took an arrow in his eye. But other impressive monastic buildings survive and make for atmospheric explorations.

The battlefield's innocently rolling lush hillsides do little to evoke the ferocity of the event, but hi-tech interactive presentations and blow-by-blow audio tours do their utmost to bring the battle to life.

Sleeping & Eating

Tollgate Farmhouse (☎ 777436; www.tollgatefarmhouse.co.uk; 59 North Trade Rd; d £60-70; P ☒ 💻) A homely atmosphere can be found a 10-minute walk from the centre of Battle at this large domestic residence with a handful of florid en-suite rooms dotted with embroidery and fake flowers, and several extra surprises tucked up its sleeve: Jacuzzi, sauna and outdoor pool among them.

Powdermills (☎ 775511; www.powdermillshotel.com; Powdermill Lane; s/d £95/120; P ☒ 💻) Rebuilt in the 18th century after a Napoleonic gunpowder works dispatched the previous manor with a bang, this well-heeled country-house hotel revels in 80-hectare grounds of tranquil lakes and woodland that adjoin Battle Abbey's grounds. It has classic four-postered rooms and a wonderful orangery restaurant.

Pilgrim's Restaurant (☎ 772314; 1 High St; mains £11-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Misshapen beams crisscross rough-plastered walls in this spectacular 15th-century pilgrim's lodging, now housing the finest and funkiest place to dine in Battle. Committed to using local produce, it's also open for afternoon tea and evening cocktails and there's a children's menu available.

Getting There & Away

National Express bus 023 from London (£10.80, 2¼ hours) to Hastings passes through Battle daily. Bus 4/5 runs every hour to Hastings (26 minutes). Trains also run to London Charing Cross every half-hour (£18, 1½ hours), via Hastings (16 minutes).

AROUND BATTLE

Bodiam Castle

Seemingly an escapee from a bedtime storybook of medieval knights and feisty princesses, this archetypal four-towered **castle** (NT; ☎ 01580-830436; adult/child £4.60/2.30; 🕒 10am-6pm mid-Feb–Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-early Feb) is surrounded by a square moat teeming with oversized goldfish. It is the legacy of 14th-century soldier of fortune (the polite term for knights that slaughtered and pillaged their way around France) Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, who married the local heiress and set about building a castle to make everybody knew damn sure who was the new boss.

Parliamentarian forces left the castle in ruins during the Civil War, but in 1917 Lord Curzon, former viceroy of India, bought it and restored the exterior. Much of the interior remains unrestored, but it's possible to climb to the battlements for some sweeping views.

You'll most likely hear the tooting of the nearby **Kent & East Sussex steam railway** (☎ 0870 600 6074; www.kesr.org.uk; adult/3-15yr £10.50/5.50), which runs from Tenterden in Kent through 11 miles of gentle hills and woods to Bodiam village, from where a bus takes you to the castle. It operates three to five services most days from May to September and at the weekend and school holidays in October, December and February. It's closed November, January and most of March.

The castle is 9 miles northeast of Battle. Arriva bus 254 stops at Bodiam from Hastings (38 minutes) hourly during the day Monday to Saturday.

THE LAST INVASION OF ENGLAND

The most famous battle in the history of England took place in 1066: a date seared into every English schoolchild's brain. The Battle of Hastings began when Harold's army arrived on the scene on October 14th and created a three-ring defence consisting of archers, then cavalry, with massed infantry at the rear. William marched north from Hastings and took up a position about 400m south of Harold and his troops. He tried repeatedly to break the English cordon, but Harold's men held fast. William's knights then feigned retreat, drawing some of Harold's troops after them. It was a fatal mistake. Seeing the gap in the English wall, William ordered his remaining troops to charge through, and the battle was as good as won. Among the English casualties was King Harold who, as graphically depicted in the Bayeux tapestry, was hit in the eye by an arrow. While he tried to pull the arrow out he was struck down by Norman knights. At news of his death the last English resistance collapsed.

In their wonderfully irreverent *1066 And All That* (1930), WC Sellar and RJ Yeatman suggest that 'the Norman conquest was a Good Thing, as from this time onward England stopped being conquered and thus was able to become top nation…' When you consider that England hasn't been successfully invaded since, it's hard to disagree.

EASTBOURNE

☎ 01323 / pop 106,562

A classic golden-oldie seaside resort that has long brought to mind images of octogenarians dozing in deck chairs or tapping their feet to brassy tunes on the 1930s bandstand, elegant Eastbourne nonetheless likes to promote its many charms to sprightlier generations. There's certainly no doubting the appeal of its pebbly beaches, scrupulously snipped seaside gardens and picturesque arcade-free promenade, but if you're looking for cosmopolitan buzz, grab your chocolate-flake ice cream and head for Brighton.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0906 711 2212; www.visiteastbourne.com; Cornfield Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat Apr-Sep) can find accommodation for a £3 fee. Access email at nearby **Coffee Republic** (☎ 438576; 69 Terminus Rd; per 20 min/1hr £1/3; 🕒 7am-6pm).

Sights & Activities

A lovely vantage point for the sunset, Eastbourne's pretty filigree-trimmed pier also has a curious Victorian **Camera Obscura** (adult/child £2/1; 🕒 noon-5pm Apr-Sep) that projects images of the outside world into a dish within a darkened room. In July daredevils in feathery frocks hurl themselves from the pier in the annual birdman competition.

Eastbourne's two quirky little museums are devoted to nostalgia. The **Museum of Shops** (☎ 737143; www.how-we-lived-then.co.uk; 20 Cornfield Tce; adult/child £4/3; 🕒 10am-5pm) is swamped by an obsessive collection of how-we-lived memorabilia, while **Eastbourne Heritage Centre** (☎ 411189; www.eastbourneheritagecentre.co.uk; 2 Carlisle Rd; adult/child £1/50p; 🕒 2-5pm Apr-early Oct) perks up exhibits on the town's development with eccentric asides, such as on Donald McGill, the pioneer of the 'naughty postcard'.

As part of Eastbourne's drive to attract younger visitors, water sports are increasingly popular. **Spray Water Sports Centre** (☎ 417023; Royal Pde) offers courses in sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and power boating.

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 0871 666 0000; www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7/3.50; 🕒 tours every 30min 10am-4.30pm Apr-Sep) runs buses around local sights, including Beachy Head cliffs.

Sleeping

Ebor Lodge (☎ 640792; beryl@mnewson.freeserve.co.uk; 71 Royal Pde; s/d from £25/50) A motherly welcome sweeps you into this homy, well-maintained B&B five minutes' walk west of the centre along the seafront. It's a great deal with en-suite rooms decorated with a feminine eye for frills, and about a 10-second run from the seashore.

Albert & Victoria (☎ 730948; www.albertandvictoria.com; 19 St Aubyns Rd; s/d 45/70; ☒) Book ahead to stay at this delightful Victorian terraced house with opulent rooms, canopied beds, crystal chandeliers and bay windows, mere paces from the seafront promenade.

Eating

Eastbourne's 'restaurant row' can be found on the seafront end of Terminus Rd.

Café Belge (☎ 729967; www.cafebelge.co.uk; 11/23 Grand Pde; mains £9-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A fabulous position near the pier with large windows facing the seafront, a ridiculous choice of seafood dishes with an emphasis on mussels, and three-score choices of Belgian beer make this a hard restaurant to resist.

Getting There & Around

National Express runs two daily buses to London Victoria (£11.40, 2¾ hours) and to Brighton (55 minutes). The slower bus 12 runs three times an hour (twice hourly on Sunday) to Brighton (one hour 20 minutes).

Trains for London Victoria (£19.60, 1½ hours) and Brighton (£7.90, 30 to 40 minutes) leave every half-hour.

Wheely Good Fun (☎ 479077; www.onelifegroup.co.uk) hires skates and bikes from Fisherman's Green on Royal Pde.

AROUND EASTBOURNE

Beachy Head

The famous chalk cliffs of Beachy Head are the highest point of a string of milky-white rock faces that slice across this rugged stretch of coast at the southern end of the South Downs. It's a spot of thrilling beauty, at least until some fool guidebook spoils it all by mentioning that this is also one of England's top suicide spots.

From Beachy Head, the famous Seven Sisters Cliffs rollercoaster their way west. Along the way, you'll stumble upon tiny seaside hamlet Birling Gap. Stop at the unthatched but still wood-beamed and log-fire-warmed **Thatched Bar** (☎ 01323-423197; mains £4.50-7; 🕒 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun), beside the Birling Gap Hotel, for decent pub grub, real ale or ice cream. One you're fortified, you might want to descend the metal cliffside steps to the grey shingly beach and make the bracing several-mile walk back to the lighthouse. Just keep a wary eye on the tide.

Beachy Head is off the B2103, from the A259 between Eastbourne and Newhaven. Eastbourne's City Sightseeing tour bus (see p233) stops at the clifftop.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

☎ 01273 / pop 206,648

Brighton, Brighton, Brighton. Where to start? This is the most vibrant seaside resort in England and a high point in any visit to the region. In summer its pebbled shoreline throngs with sunbathers and beachside bars fizzle with energy and music. A multitude of trendy restaurants, slick boutique hotels and shops catering to every taste jam the streets leading back from the sea. The city's nightlife is legendary and more concentrated than its rivals in London and Manchester. Family fun, high-brow culture, an exuberant gay population and cutting-edge club scene all mingle into one good-time getaway not to miss.

Don't listen to the folk that call Brighton little London-on-the-Sea. However cosmopolitan it has become, this is a place with a character and quirkiness all its own. It has embraced the outlandish ever since the Prince Regent built his party palace here in the 19th century. And these days anyone can join in the fun. Celebrities rub shoulders with dreadlocked hippies, drag queens party next to designer-clad urbanites, couples stroll past fishermen and kids toddle around the tables of coffee-quaffing media types. It's a city with a devil-may-care attitude: from its edgy cool underbelly to its hedonistic highs, its chic gloss to its seedy Soho glam, its candyfloss frolics to its Bohemian detachment. Mix all its flavours together to get one heady cocktail, and a place for everyone in the shaker.

Orientation

Brighton Town merged with its western neighbour Hove in 2000. The train station is half a mile north of the beach, while the tiny bus station is tucked away in Poole Valley close to Brighton Pier. Old Steine (pronounced steen) is the major thoroughfare linking pier and centre. To the west lies a tangle of pedestrian alleyways known as the Lanes, packed with pubs, restaurants and trendy boutiques. A short walk north is the North Laine, full of quirky stores and Bohemian cafés. The city's effervescent gay scene flourishes in Kemptown, east of Old Steine along St James' St. Brighton's burgeoning marina, east of town, is also a vibrant waterside shopping, dining, drinking and water-sports centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Borders Books (☎ 731122; Churchill Sq Shopping Centre; ⌚ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun)

Brighton Books (☎ 693845; 18 Kensington Gardens; ⌚ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Secondhand bookshop.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Junction (☎ 607650; 109 Western Rd; per hr £2.50)

Jubilee Library (☎ 296961; Jubilee St; ⌚ 10am-7pm Mon-Tue, to 5pm Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, to 4pm Sat) Bring ID and sign up to use machines for free.

Netpama (☎ 227188; 37 Preston St; per 30min 50p)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Brighton City Guide (www.brighton.co.uk)

Insight City News (www.theinsight.co.uk)

visitbrighton.com (www.visitbrighton.com)

LAUNDRY

Preston Street Laundrette (☎ 738556; 75 Preston St; ⌚ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Royal Sussex County Hospital (☎ 696955; Eastern Rd) Has an accident and emergency department 2 miles east of the centre.

Wistons Clinic (☎ 506263; 138 Dyke Rd) For general medical consultations; less than a mile from the centre.

MONEY

American Express (☎ 712906; 82 North St) Has a bureau de change.

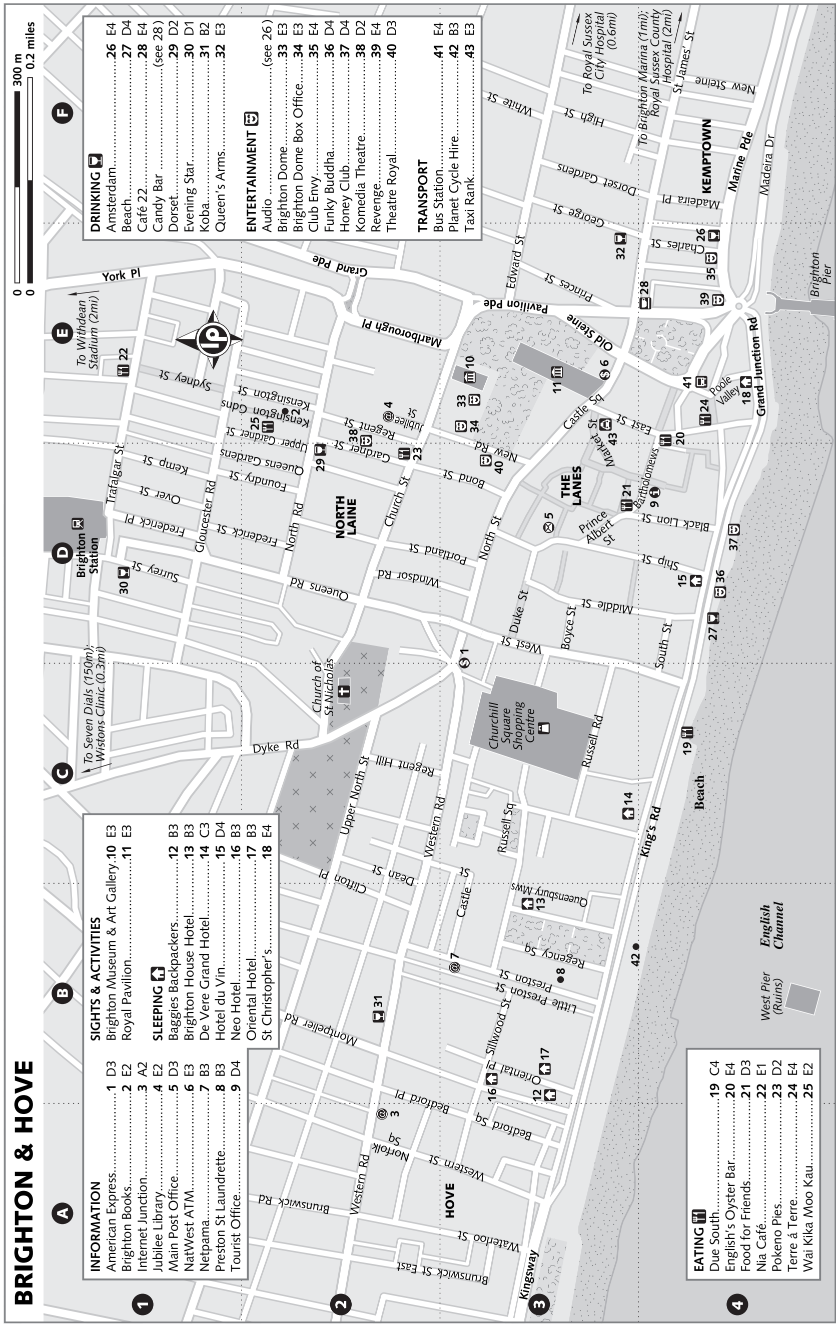
NatWest (Castle Sq) Bank with ATM.

POST

Main post office (Ship St; ⌚ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2255; www.visitbrighton.com; 10 Bartholomew Sq; ⌚ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Easter) Overworked staff and a 50p-per-minute telephone line provide local information. You may find the website and on-site 24-hour accessible computer more helpful.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0 300 m
0 0.2 miles
A B C D E F
1 2 3 4
To Royal Sussex County Hospital (0.6mi)
To Brighton Marina (1mi); Royal Sussex County Hospital (2mi)
To Withdean Stadium (2mi)
To Seven Dials (150m); Wistons Clinic (0.3mi)
Brighton Station
NORTH LAINE
THE LANES
KEMPTOWN
HOVE
Church of St Nicholas
Churchill Square Shopping Centre
Brighton Pier
West Pier (Ruins)
Beach
English Channel
King's Rd
Grand Junction Rd
Madeira Dr
Marine Pde
Old Steine
Pavilion Pde
Grand Pde
York Pl
Dyke Rd
Western Rd
Queens Rd
North St
West St
Preston St
Kingsway
Brunswick Rd

Sights

ROYAL PAVILION

If you thought the current batch of British royals was an eccentric bunch, just wait until you see Brighton's outlandish crowning jewel, the **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 290900; www.royalpavilion.org.uk; adult/under 15yr £7.50/5; ⏰ 10am-4.30pm Oct-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep). The dazzlingly exotic palace-cum-playpad of Prince George (see the boxed text, opposite), later Prince Regent then King George IV, is easily one of the most self-indulgently decadent buildings in England and an apt symbol of Brighton's reputation for hedonism. Even the forest of Indian-style domes and minarets outside is only a prelude to the palace's lavish oriental-themed interior, where no colour is deemed too strong, dragons swoop and snarl from gilt-smothered ceilings, gem-encrusted snakes slither down pillars, and crystal chandeliers seem ordered by the tonne. While gawping is the main activity, you can pick up an audio tour (included in the admission price) to learn more about the palace, room by room.

BRIGHTON MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Set in the Royal Pavilion's renovated stable block, this **museum & art gallery** (☎ 290900; Royal Pavilion Gardens; admission free; ⏰ 10am-7pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has a glittering collection of 20th-century art and design, including a crimson Salvador Dalí sofa modelled on Mae West's lips. There's also an enthralling gallery of world art, and a multimedia exhibit on Brighton's history where you can listen in on stories told by older and past generations.

BRIGHTON PIER

This grand old centenarian **pier** (Palace Pier; www.brightonpier.co.uk; admission free) is Brighton beach's centrepiece and the place to shake off the city's cosmopolitan gloss and embrace its tackier seaside soul. Start by dizzying yourself on a few stomach-churning fairground rides, whiz around the Helter Skelter made famous by the Beatles song, buy a few sticks of Brighton Rock, then flop into a candy-striped deck chair and scoff candyfloss to your heart's content.

Its sad skeletal twin **West Pier** (www.westpier.co.uk) is a ghostly iron hulk that attracts flocks of birds at sunset. It's a sad end for a Victorian marvel upon which the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel once performed. There are now plans to replace it with a *Jetsons*-esque Brighton i360 observation tower.

Tours

The tourist office can organise a range of guided tours:

Brighton Walks (☎ 888596; www.brightonwalks.com; adult/child £6/3.50) Offers a huge variety of standard and offbeat themes including Gay's the Word and Ghost Walk. Show up for prescheduled walks or call to book.

City Sightseeing (www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/2.50; ⏰ tours every 30min mid-Jun–Aug) Has open-top hop-on hop-off bus tours that leave from Grand Junction Rd near Brighton Pier and take you around the main sights.

Tourist Tracks (www.tourist-tracks.com) Has MP3-format audio guides downloadable from its website (£5) or you can hire them on a preloaded MP3 player at the tourist office for £6 per half-day.

Festivals & Events

From Gay Pride to sand sculpture, there's always something fun going on in Brighton, but the showpiece is May's three-week-long **Brighton Festival** (☎ 709709; www.brighton-festival.org.uk), the biggest arts festival in Britain after Edinburgh. A packed programme of theatre, dance, music and comedy features performers from all over the world.

Sleeping

Despite a glut of hotels in Brighton, prices are relatively high and you'd be wise to book well ahead for summer weekends and the Brighton Festival in May.

BUDGET

Brighton's hostels are a varied bunch – several catering to raucous stag and hen nights, while others are more traditional and homely. Choose wisely!

Baggies Backpackers (☎ 733740; 33 Oriental Pl; dm/d £13/35) A warm familial atmosphere, worn-in charm and motherly on-site owner, as well as clean, snug dorms have made this long-established hostel something of an institution. It's also blessed with a homely kitchen, an all-too-comfy basement music room thick with cassettes, and TV room piled high with videos.

St Christopher's (☎ 202035; www.palacebrighton.co.uk; Palace Hotel, 10/12 Grand Junction Rd; dm £16-19.50, s/d £25/50; 🖥) Party people gravitate to this no-frills hostel on the seafront. While quiet is a rare luxury, it boasts sea views and a spot near Brighton Pier and clubbing hot spots. Prices include breakfast and linen, but bring a lock for the under-bed cage. There's no kitchen.

THE PRINCE, THE PALACE & THE PISS-UP

It's widely known that England's George III was periodically, to be polite, off his rocker. But you'd be forgiven for thinking that 'Mad King George's' eldest son Prince George (1762–1830) was the eccentric in the family upon visiting his princely pavilion at Brighton. The young prince began drinking with abandon and enjoying the pleasures of women while still a teenager. And to daddy's displeasure he soon started hanging out with his dissolute uncle the Duke of Cumberland, who was enjoying himself royally by the sea in Brighton.

In 1787 George commissioned Henry Holland to design a neoclassical villa as his personal pleasure palace. While he waited to accede to the throne (when his father was declared officially insane in 1810 he was sworn in as Prince Regent), George whiled away the years with extravagant piss-ups for himself, his mistresses and his aristocratic mates.

Ever conscious of what was trendy, George decided in 1815 to convert the Marine Pavilion to reflect the current fascination with all things Eastern. He engaged the services of John Nash, who laboured for eight years to create a Mogul Indian–style palace, complete with the most lavish Chinese interior imaginable. George finally had a palace suited to his outlandish tastes, and to boot he was now the king.

His brother and successor, William IV (1765–1837), also used the pavilion as a royal residence, as did William's niece Victoria (1819–1901). But the conservative queen never really took to the place and in 1850 sold it to the town, but not before stripping it of every piece of furniture – 143 wagons were needed to transport the contents. Thankfully, many original items were later returned and the palace is restored to its former glory.

MIDRANGE

Brighton is blessed with a wide selection of midrange accommodations.

Oriental Hotel (☎ 205050; www.orientalhotel.co.uk; 9 Oriental Pl; s without bathroom £35-40, d with bathroom Sun-Thu £60-100, Fri & Sat £80-125; ☒ wi-fi) Once home to a famously Bohemian nightclub, this stylishly renovated boutique hotel now houses sleek modern rooms in shades of coffee and mint, with fresh flowers, aromatherapy lights, and CD and DVD players. Downstairs there's a cosy candlelit bar with mosaic-tiled tables. The breakfast is organic.

Brighton House Hotel (☎ 323282; www.brightonhousehotel.co.uk; 52 Regency Sq; s £35-80, d £55-140; ☒ wi-fi) A traditionally styled Regency hotel with immaculate rooms, welcoming proprietors and refreshingly healthy breakfasts with organic ingredients and vegetarian options. Children are not catered to here. There's discounted parking in an underground lot next door.

Neo Hotel (☎ 711104; www.neohotel.com; 19 Oriental Pl; Fri-Sun s £60, d £100-150, Mon-Thu s £55, d £95-135; ☒ wi-fi) No surprise that the owner of this gorgeous designer-chic hotel is an interiors stylist. The nine rooms could belong in a showroom, each finished in rich colours and tactile fabrics, with bold floral and Asian motifs. Kick back in satin kimono robes, and watch a DVD on your flat-screen TV or indulge in massage and beauty treatments. One for couples, but not the kids.

TOP END

Hotel du Vin (☎ 718588; www.hotelduvin.com; Ship St; d from £135; ☒) This endearing jumble of Gothic-styled buildings near the seafront has been gifted with a new gloss of sophistication to become one of Brighton's foremost boutique hotels. Fronted by young, sparky staff and boasting three-dozen elegant rooms with Egyptian linen and irreproachable bathrooms, the hotel's trump card is its wonderful bistro with a wine list to impress savvy connoisseurs. Breakfast is extra.

De Vere Grand Hotel (☎ 224300; www.devere.co.uk; King's Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £140/220; P ☒ 🖥 ♿) Attracting the gentry since 1864, this five-star institution overlooks the seafront. Trimmed by confectionlike filigree wrought iron outside, its palatial interior is dotted with top-hatted bellboys and dignitaries. Luxurious rooms boast superb views and some Lilliputian balconies.

Eating

Brighton has the biggest and best choice of eateries on the south coast, with cafés, diners and restaurants to fulfil every whim.

BUDGET

Brighton is one of Britain's best destinations for vegetarians, and its innovative meat-free menus are also terrific value for anyone on a tight budget.

Pokeno Pies (☎ 684921; 52 Gardner St; pies £3.85; 🕒 10am-6pm) Bang goes the greasy image of the great British pie shop: this is guilt-free comfort food at its best. The slick glass-fronted café-takeaway has cornered the local market in affordable and surprisingly healthy gourmet pies. There are more than a dozen fillings, from richly flavoured Mediterranean lamb to Moroccan aubergine and feta.

Wai Kika Moo Kau (☎ 671117; 11a Kensington Gardens; mains £5-8; 🕒 9am-6pm) Say its daft name fast and you'll get a clue to the ethos of this primarily veggie-vegan café. It spills onto the pedestrian street outside so you can sip your soyachino or tuck into meat-free specials as the shoppers pass by.

Food For Friends (☎ 202310; 17a Prince Albert St; mains £6-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This airy glass-sided restaurant attracts the attention of passers-by as much as it does the loyalty of its customers with an ever-inventive choice of vegetarian and vegan food. Children are also catered to.

MIDRANGE

Nia Café (☎ 671371; 87-88 Trafalgar St; mains £8-13; 🕒 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) There's a very organic, textured feel about this simple rustic-chic café furnished with rough-cut wooden tables, pitted floor and exposed brick. It's a popular spot to chew the fat over a cappuccino or glass of organic wine, or to tuck into daily specials.

Terre á Terre (☎ 729051; 71 East St; mains £10-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner Tue) Herbivores have never had it so good. Terre á Terre offers cultured vegetarian dining in a blissful air-con environment with simple wood furniture, elegant stemware and striking citrus art. The inventive dishes, full of rich robust flavours, are exhaustively explained in the menu.

Seven Dials (☎ 885555; 1-3 Buckingham Pl; set lunch/dinner from £10/26.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Housed in an imposing former bank, this formal and crisply set-out restaurant is praised for excellent seasonal fish dishes. It's almost a mile from the seafront but worth the walk or taxi fare for a special occasion or well-deserved splurge.

Due South (☎ 821218; 139 Kings Rd Arches; mains £11-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Sheltered under a cavernous Victorian arch on the seafront with a curvaceous front window and small bamboo-screened terrace on the promenade, this refined yet relaxed restaurant specialises in dishes cooked with local, environmentally sustainable and seasonal ingredients.

English's Oyster Bar (☎ 327980; 29-31 East St; mains £11-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A 60-year institution, this Brightonian seafood paradise dishes up everything from oysters and traditional scampi to lavish lobster thermidor. It's converted from fishermen's cottages, with echoes of the elegant Edwardian era inside and buzzing alfresco dining on the pedestrian square outside.

Drinking

Brighton's nightlife is second only to London's, and has its own unique cocktail mix of clubs and bars along the seafront. For more ideas, visit www.drinkinbrighton.com.

Evening Star (☎ 328931; www.eveningstarbrighton.co.uk; 55 Surrey St) Hopheads heap praise on this beer-drinkers paradise; a snug unpretentious pub with a conveniently short stagger to the station after a sendoff from its wonderful selection of award-winning real ales, Belgian beers, organic lagers and real ciders.

Beach (☎ 722272; 171 Kings Rd Arches) On a summer's day, there's nowhere better to sit and watch the world go by than at this popular beach bar and club. It has a funky brick-vaulted interior, and a wide terrace spilling onto the promenade within earshot of the surf and within sight of the talent dipping into it.

Koba (☎ 720059; www.kobauk.com; 135 Western Rd; 🕒 5pm-late) This übercool cocktail bar oozes it-crowd extravagance and exclusivity. It's technically a member's club but the sumptuous velvet-draped front bar opens to the hoi polloi until 11pm, just enough time to ingratiate yourself with a member to be invited back into the private 'Champagne Bar' or 'The Gods' with high ceiling and altar-style bar.

Dorset (☎ 605423; www.thedorset.co.uk; 28 North Rd) There's a laid-back Parisian street-café feel to this gastropub and Brighton institution, which throws open its doors and windows in fine weather and spills tables onto the pavement. You'll be just as welcome for a morning coffee as for an evening pint here, and if you decide not to leave between the two, there's always its decent menu too.

Entertainment

Brighton offers the best entertainment line-up on the south coast, with clubs to rival London and Manchester for cool. Keep tabs on what's hot and what's not by searching out publications such as the *List* or the *Source* and *What's On*.

NIGHTCLUBS

When Britain's top DJs aren't plying their trade in London, Ibiza or Aya Napia, chances are you'll spy them here. All Brighton's clubs open until 2am, and many as late as 5am.

Honey Club (☎ 202807; www.thehoneyclub.co.uk; 214 Kings Rd Arches; admission £5-12) A cavernous seafront club that jumps from strength to strength, almost as popular with DJs as it is with the weekly queues of clubbers that pile into its glittering depths. Dress up, party hard, then cool off your aching feet in the sea.

Audio (☎ 606906; www.audiobrighton.com; 10 Marine Pde; admission £3-8) Some of the city's top club nights can be found at this ear-numbing venue, where the music's top priority, cheap-drink offers roll and the dress-down rule of thumb deters designer dollies. Every night is different.

Funky Buddha (☎ 725541; www.funkybuddhabrighton.co.uk; Kings Rd Arches; admission £2-8) Lotus flower lamps and stylish chandeliers illuminate the twin arches of this sexy little subterranean seafront club, which dips into everything from acid house to disco.

THEATRE

Brighton Dome (☎ 709709; www.brighton-dome.org.uk; 29 New Rd) Once the stables and exercise yard of King George IV, this Art Deco complex houses three theatre venues within the Royal Pavilion estate. The box office is located on New Rd.

Theatre Royal (☎ 328488; New St) Built by decree of the Prince of Wales in 1806, this venue hosts plays, musicals and operas.

Komedia Theatre (☎ 467100; www.komedia.co.uk; Gardner St, North Laine) This former billiards hall

GAY & LESBIAN BRIGHTON

Perhaps it's Brighton's long-time association with the theatre, but for more than 100 years the city has been a gay haven. Gay icons Noel Coward and Ivor Novello were regular visitors, but in those days the scene was furtive and separate. From the 1960s onwards, the scene really began to open up, especially in the Kemptown area and around Old Steine. Today, with more than 25,000 gay men and 10,000 to 15,000 lesbians living in the city, it is the most vibrant queer community in Britain outside London.

Kemptown (aka Camptown), on and off St James' St, is where it's all at. In recent years the old Brunswick Town area of Hove has emerged as a quieter alternative to the traditionally cruisey (and sometimes seedy) Kemptown, but the community here has responded by branching out from the usual pubs that served as nightly pick-up joints. Now you will find a rank of gay-owned businesses, from cafés and hotels to bookshops as well as the more obvious bars, clubs and saunas. There's even a Gay's The Word walking tour (see Brighton Walks, p236).

For up-to-date information on what's going on in gay Brighton, check out the websites www.gay.brighton.co.uk and www.realbrighton.com or pick up the free monthly magazine **Gscene** (www.gscene.com) from various venues or the tourist office.

For Drinking…

Amsterdam (☎ 688825; www.amsterdam.uk.com; 11-12 Marine Pde; 🕒 noon-2am) Hotel, sauna, restaurant and extremely hip bar above the pier; its sun terrace is a particular hit.

Café 22 (☎ 626682; 129 St James' St; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) This cool coffee shop hang-out and internet café is *the* place to get word on everything going on in town. It has snacks for £2 to £3.

Candy Bar (☎ 622424; www.thecandybar.co.uk; 129 St James' St; 🕒 9pm-2am) Slick café-bar-club venue for the girls, with pink-lit arches, curvaceous bar, pool table and dance floor.

Queen's Arms (☎ 696873; www.queensarmsbrighton.com; 7 George St; 🕒 3pm-late) Plenty of camp in the cabaret and karaoke acts at this pub make it a definite stop on the Brighton gay trail.

For Dancing…

Bars and pubs may be fun, but the real action takes place on and off the dance floor.

Club Envy (8-9 Marine Pde; 🕒 9am-2am) Stylish, chic but claustrophobic club where every night is different.

Revenge (☎ 608133; www.revenge.co.uk; 7 Marine Pde; 🕒 10.30pm-3am) Nightly disco, occasional cabaret and a dash of drag.

and supermarket is now a stylish comedy, theatre and cabaret venue.

Shopping

An atmospheric jigsaw puzzle of narrow lanes and tiny alleyways that was once a fishing village, the Lanes is Brighton's most popular shopping district. Its every twist and turn is packed with jewellers, coffee shops and boutiques selling everything from antique firearms to the latest foot fashions. There's another, less claustrophobic shopping district in North Laine, a series of streets northwest of the Lanes, including Bond, Gardner, Kensington and Sydney Sts, that are chock-full of retro-cool boutiques, music stalls and craft outlets.

Getting There & Away

Brighton is 53 miles from London and transport is fast and frequent.

BUS

Coaches leave hourly to London Victoria (£10, two hours 20 minutes) and twice hourly to Lewes (50 minutes) and Eastbourne (one hour 30 minutes). They also go twice daily to Chichester (2¼ hours) and Arundel (two hours). **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) has coach links to all London airports.

TRAIN

There are four hourly services to London Victoria and King's Cross stations (£17.70, 1¼ hours). For £2 on top of the rail fare you can get a PlusBus ticket that gives you unlimited travel on Brighton & Hove buses for the day. There are three services per hour to Portsmouth (£13.80, 1½ hours) and twice-hourly services to Chichester, Eastbourne and Hastings, as well as links to Canterbury and Dover.

Getting Around

Brighton is a sizable place but you'll be able to cover most of it on foot. Alternatively you can buy a day ticket (£2.80) from the driver to scoot back and forth on Brighton & Hove buses.

Parking can be an expensive nightmare. To park in any central street space you will need a voucher. They can be purchased from various garages and shops around town and cost £1.50 per half-hour in the centre, or per hour further out. Alternatively, there's a Park & Ride outside town with connecting buses, and pay-and-display parking along the Kingsway in Hove.

Cab companies include **Brighton Streamline Taxis** (☎ 747474) and **City Cabs** (☎ 205205) and there's a taxi rank on the junction of East St and Market St.

You can rent bikes from **Planet Cycle Hire** (☎ 748881; West Pier Promenade; ⏲ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue May-Sep, 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Oct-Apr), next to West Pier, for £8/12 per half-day/day. A deposit and ID are required.

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South Wales

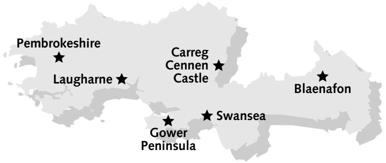
Take a clutch of scarred medieval castles. Add a twist of Unesco World Heritage industrial history. Squeeze in some of Britain's wildest coast. Sprinkle liberally with sleepy villages, secret coves and surfing hotzspots and throw in some rolling hills for good measure. Smother with local pride and, hey presto, this is a microcosm of Wales. Welcome to the south, where the Welsh Dragon breathes as strongly as ever.

Stretching over 100 miles from historic border-town Chepstow in the east to the big sky and sea views of the jagged coast in the west, south Wales packs it in. The big draw is Pembrokeshire, the Welsh Land's End where the winds of outdoor life blows year-round. Almost 200 miles of magical shoreline has been defined a national park, delineated by craggy cliffs, golden sands, chocolate-box villages and traditional seaside resorts. St David's, Britain's smallest city, nestles at its westernmost tip and is home to Wales' holiest site. For budding hikers, the Pembrokeshire Coast Path is one of Britain's most celebrated long-distance walks.

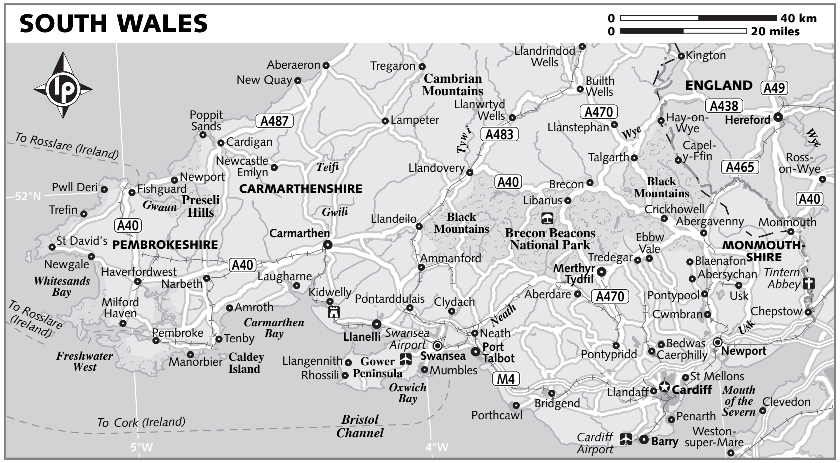
At the eastern extremity, Chepstow's striking castle welcomes visitors to Wales, and the Wye Valley is a beguiling place to paddle the waters. In between, things get gritty, with Blaenafon and Big Pit providing stark reminders of a collapsed industrial heritage. Dropping down to the coast, modern Swansea is emerging as a serious rival to Cardiff, and the tiny, beach-rich Gower Peninsula is one of Wales' loveliest corners.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking to Wales' most spectacular fortress, **Carreg Cennen Castle** (p674)
- Discovering World Heritage steel and coal history at Big Pit in **Blaenafon** (p666)
- Surfing at the stress-dispelling **Gower Peninsula** (p672)
- Charting Wales' industrial past at Swansea's **National Waterfront Museum** (p668)
- Embracing rugged cliffs, secluded beaches and adrenaline thrills in **Pembrokeshire** (p675)
- Chilling out at **Laugharne** (p673), Dylan Thomas' seaside hideaway



- POPULATION: 1,741,443
- AREA: 2911 SQ MILES


SOUTH WALES
0 40 km
0 20 miles
Aberaeron
Tregaron
New Quay
Cambrian Mountains
Llandrindod Wells
Builth Wells
Kington
ENGLAND
A49
A438
Hereford
Wye
Poppit Sands
A487
Lampeter
Llanwrtyd Wells
A470
Llanstephan
Wye
Hay-on-Wye
To Rosslare (Ireland)
Cardigan
Tywi
A483
Capel-y-Ffin
Ross-on-Wye
Newcastle Emlyn
Teifi
Llandovery
Talgarth
A465
Pwll Deri
Newport
Fishguard
CARMARTHENSHIRE
A40
Brecon
Black Mountains
52°N
Preseli Hills
Gwaun
Libanus
A40
Trefin
Gwili
Llandeilo
Black Mountains
Brecon Beacons National Park
Crickhowell
Abergavenny
Monmouth
A40
Carmarthen
Ebbw Vale
MONMOUTHSHIRE
St David's
PEMBROKESHIRE
Newgale
A40
Ammanford
Tredegar
Blaenafon
Haverfordwest
Laugharne
Merthyr Tydfil
Abersychan
Tintern Abbey
Whitesands Bay
Narbeth
Kidwelly
Pontarddulais
Clydach
Aberdare
A470
Pontypool
Usk
Milford Haven
Amroth
Neath
Cwmbran
Chepstow
To Rosslare (Ireland)
Carmarthen Bay
Neath
Usk
Pembroke
Tenby
Llanelli
Swansea Airport
Port Talbot
Pontypridd
Bedwas
Caerphilly
Newport
Freshwater West
Manorbier
Caldey Island
Llangennith
Gower Peninsula
Swansea
Mumbles
Rhossili
Oxwich Bay
M4
St Mellons
Llandaff
Cardiff
Mouth of the Severn
Clevedon
Bridgend
To Cork (Ireland)
Bristol Channel
Porthcawl
Penarth
Cardiff Airport
Barry
Weston-super-Mare
5°W
4°W

Activities

Outdoor activities abound across south Wales. The main draw is Pembrokeshire, with excellent canoeing, surfing, fishing and, most thrilling of all, coasteering. Craggy cliffs also offer superb rock climbing all around the wild coast.

Landlubbers can take pony rides on the beach or inland through the Preseli Hills, which is also fine mountain-biking territory. Walkers flock to the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, a 186-mile jaunt through some of Britain's most spectacular scenery.

In the valleys of southeast Wales canal towpaths, forest tracks and former railway lines provide good cycling and mountain biking. Canoeing is possible on the River Wye and surfers dig the breaks on the Gower Peninsula, where there are also beautiful day-walks. Hikers love Offa's Dyke Path and the Wye Valley Walk.

For more information see Southeast Wales (opposite) and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (p675).

Throughout this chapter, short local walks are suggested, while further details can be found in the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83). Tourist offices provide maps and guides.

Getting There & Around

Frequent train and bus services run from England, especially to Cardiff and Swansea. The further west you venture, beyond Carmarthen into Pembrokeshire, the less frequent the public transport.

The South Wales main-line railway runs east–west from Bristol in England via Cardiff to Swansea, continuing on the West Wales line via Carmarthen to three west-coast terminals – Fishguard, Pembroke Dock (both ports for Ireland) and Milford Haven. The famously scenic Heart of Wales line (p694) terminates in Swansea.

The Arriva Cymru X40 bus runs daily from Cardiff to Swansea and Carmarthen. National Express has daily services from Bristol to Haverfordwest, via Swansea.

Tourist offices keep detailed bus timetables. For more details contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk) and **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Several travel passes from **Arriva Trains** (☎ 0870 9000 777; www.walesflexipass.co.uk) are good value. The Freedom of South Wales Flexi-Rover (peak/off-peak £35/30) allows three days of train and seven days of bus travel in a seven-day period. The 4 in 8 Pass (peak/off-peak £55/45) offers four days' train and eight days' bus travel in an eight-day period, and the 8 in 15 Pass (peak/off-peak £92/75) gives eight days train and 15 days bus travel in a 15-day period. Buy them over the phone, online or at most train stations.

SOUTHEAST WALES

Southeast Wales is industrialised, home to half the country's population and much of its big business. But strike out beyond the urban sprawl and there's much to admire amongst the sweeping, history-rich uplands.

In keeping with the industrial theme, there's classic heritage here. The sombre valleys of Taff, Rhymney and Rhondda were once the heartbeat of the iron and coal trades, which brought wealth and, later in the 1980s, despair in equal measure. Gradually, tourists are discovering that areas such as Blaenafon, a World Heritage Site, and Big Pit are crucial in uncovering the true Wales.

To the east, the Wye Valley stretches north–south from the market town of Monmouth to Chepstow's moody castle and celebrated horse-racing track. In between, the ethereal riverbank ruins of Tintern Abbey are always popular.

On the southern coast, Swansea is stirring. The childhood home of poet and writer Dylan Thomas is a fitting second city and gateway to one of Wales' true gems, the windswept beach-and-cliff hideaway of the Gower Peninsula.

Activities

Despite its high population, the southeast offers picturesque walking and cycling through rolling valleys or on the wild, sandy Gower Peninsula, which is also the place to catch a wave.

CYCLING

Two national road-cycling trails transect the region. The national Lôn Las Cymru (p651) has two southern spurs, one from Cardiff along the Taff Vale to the Brecon Beacons, the other from Chepstow up the charming Vale of Usk to Abergavenny.

Exclusive to south Wales, the 220-mile Celtic Trail (p668) spans the width of the country through changing landscape, from Chepstow in the east to Fishguard on the Pembrokeshire coast.

Afan Argoed Forest Park, northeast of Swansea, is an excellent place for dedicated mountain biking.

Bicycle Beano (☎ 01982-560471; www.bicycle-beano.co.uk) runs vegetarian cycling holidays in the Wye Valley. Tours are popular and irregular, so book well ahead.

WALKING

One of Britain's best-known, most challenging long-distance routes is the 177-mile **Offa's Dyke Path** national trail. Following the English–Welsh border between Chepstow in the south and the resort of Prestatyn on the north coast, the path follows the line of the 8th-century embankment built by Offa, king of Mercia, and crosses moorland, wide valleys and ancient forest.

Less strenuous is the 136-mile **Wye Valley Walk**, which crisscrosses the Welsh–English border as it follows the beautiful River Wye to Hafren Forest in Plynlimon. Pick up the *Wye Valley Walk Official Guide* (£7.95) from the tourist offices in Chepstow and Monmouth, together with details on shorter town, valley and coastal walks.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The River Wye is a great canoeing venue and Monmouth makes a good base town. Pick up *The Canoeist's Guide to the River Wye* (£5) from **Monmouth Canoe & Activity Centre** (☎ 01600-713461; www.monmouthcanoehire.20m.com; Castle Yard, Monmouth).

Reliable surfing can be found year-round on the Gower Peninsula (see p672).

Getting There & Around

Southeast Wales has an extensive transport network. Regular bus and train services from England connect London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol with Cardiff and Swansea, while frequent provincial routes serve the towns of Monmouth and Chepstow.

Detailed timetable and fare information is available from **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk). For details of multiday travel passes, see opposite.

Local services include **Valley Lines** (www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk) from Cardiff to the Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Rhymney Valleys. A Valley Lines Day Explorer (£7) covers all travel on Valley Lines trains and Stagecoach and Rhondda buses in the area.

First Cymru bus company has a South & West Wales FirstDay ticket (£5.50) covering all buses except the fast Cardiff–Swansea Shuttle. Enquiries are handled by Traveline Cymru.

A South Wales Network Rider (£6) is a day ticket for buses in southeast Wales that aren't operated by First Cymru.

WYE VALLEY

Flowing 154 miles from its mountainous source at Plynlimon in Mid Wales to Chepstow, where it joins the River Severn, the River Wye typifies British countryside beauty. Between Monmouth and Chepstow the picturesque 16-mile stretch runs through a steep-sided wooded vale and is excellent walking country.

Serving the valley between Chepstow and Monmouth, buses 65 and 69 run daily (50 minutes, every two hours, four on Sunday).

Monmouth (Trefynwy)

☎01600 / pop 8547

Advantageously positioned at the confluence of the Rivers Wye and Monnow, bubbly Monmouth mixes staunch Georgian architecture with modern-day prosperity to make an agreeable base from which to explore the Lower Wye Valley.

The town's medieval castle was the birthplace of King Henry V, who conquered Normandy at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Many parts of Monmouth, including the main Agincourt Sq, are named after the battle.

The settlement has switched countries over the centuries but is now fixed in Wales. Despite this, an English feeling pervades and little Welsh is spoken.

The **tourist office** (☎713899; Agincourt Sq; 🕒10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) is centrally located, inside the slightly shabby 1724 Shire Hall. From here Monnow St descends to the Monnow Bridge. Heading northeast, short, narrow Church St contains craft shops, galleries and eateries.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Monmouth Museum & Local History Centre (☎710630; Priory St; admission free; 🕒10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) houses a collection of 'Nelsoniana', artefacts related to Admiral Nelson, who visited Monmouth several times en route to Pembrokeshire.

Britain's only intact late-13th-century fortified crossing, the **Monnow Bridge**, was pedestrianised in 2004. Close to Agincourt Sq are the stumpy remains of **Monmouth Castle**.

Monmouth Canoe & Activity Centre (☎713461; www.monmouthcanoehire.20m.com; Castle Yard) runs river trips by canoe (per half-/full-day £25/30) and kayak (£18/20), together with climbing and caving trips.

SLEEPING & EATING

Monnow Bridge Caravan & Camping (☎714004; Drybridge St; 2-person tent sites £7-8.50) Comfortable riverside location near the Monnow Bridge.

Queen's Head (☎712767; Church St; s/d/tr £35/45/60) Reputedly the third-most-haunted pub in Wales, the Queen's Head is a community-run place with live folk music and six clean, tidy en suite rooms. The restaurant opens irregularly for theme nights, with tasty food ranging from Russian to Arabic.

Pilgrim's Bistro (☎772744; 24 Church St; mains £11-17; 🕒lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) An ex-London policeman is the improbable chef at this award-winning, cosy bistro specialising in local and Fairtrade produce. Try the succulent Raglan lamb.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 65 and 69 ply the Wye Valley to Chepstow (50 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday); bus 60 serves Newport (one hour, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday); and bus 83 serves Abergavenny (40 minutes, about every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

Raglan Castle

Britain's final medieval fortress was **Raglan Castle** (Cadw; ☎01291-690228; adult/child £2.90/2.50; 🕒9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) and it remains a prime example of late-medieval grandeur. The dusky-pink hexagonal towers lend a stout, angled appearance that contrasts with the elaborate flourishes. Halfway up the walls, fireplaces float where floors have long since disappeared.

Built in the 15th and 16th centuries, the castle was a military success and endured one of the longest sieges of the Civil War before being wrecked and abandoned shortly afterwards.

Raglan Castle lies 7 miles west of Monmouth on the A40 to Abergavenny. Bus 60 runs from Monmouth to Raglan village (20 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday), then it's a five-minute walk.

CHEPSTOW (CAS GWENT)

☎01291 / pop 14,195

Long-distance walking and prime horse racing are reasons to come to the historic border town of Chepstow, once made wealthy by the medieval trade in wine and timber. There's also an eye-catching castle to explore but, unless you plan to hike either the Wye Valley Walk or Offa's Dyke Path, an afternoon is plenty to discover the clutch of attractions. Allow a full day if you want to visit nearby Tintern Abbey.

Chepstow lies on the border with England; down by the Boat Inn you can see a patriotic St George's Cross daubed on the rocks on the far (English) side of the river, defiantly on show for the old enemy to see.

Orientation & Information

Entering Chepstow from the A48 go left on Moor St, heading downhill to proceed through the Gate House in the Port Wall. Follow sloping High, Middle and Bridge Sts to find the castle, tourist office and River Wye. The bus station is on Thomas St, outside the Gate House, and the train station lies south of the castle and town centre – cross the A48 and head 200m down Station Rd.

The **tourist office** (☎623772; 🕒10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) is in the castle car park.

Sights

Built by the English in a superb riverside location, **Chepstow Castle** (Cadw; ☎624065; adult/child £3.50/3; 🕒9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is a large fortress best viewed from the opposite English riverbank. Construction began in 1067, one year after the Norman Conquest; it is one of the oldest castles in Wales and one of the first built of stone. Its purpose was twofold – to defend the river crossing and daunt the locals.

The structure demonstrates prime examples of how medieval military architecture evolved. It was besieged twice during the Civil War before falling out of use in 1690.

Near the castle, **Chepstow Museum** (☎625981; Bridge St; admission free; 🕒10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 11am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Oct-Jun) has good social and industrial history displays. Prints of the castle and Wye Valley through the ages mix with eclectic exhibits, such as a horrific-looking 1950s perm machine.

Built to control the flow of mercantile traders in Chepstow's medieval heyday, the 13th-century **Port Wall** (Customs Wall) can still be seen running through the town.

Just north of town, the **racecourse** (☎622260; www.chepstow-racecourse.co.uk; admission £12-28) is Wales' foremost horse-racing venue and home to the Welsh National.

Sleeping

Upper Sedbury House (☎627173; Sedbury Lane; 2-person tent sites £9, d £54, s/d without bathroom £32.50/48; 🏊) Near Offa's Dyke Path in rural Sedbury, this farm has comfortable rooms and a swimming pool in large gardens, together with a camping meadow, 1 mile from Chepstow across the Wye. Ask about the farm's role in both WWI and WWII.

First Hurdle (☎622189; www.firsthurdleguesthouse.co.uk; 9-10 Upper Church St; s/d £35/50; ☒) Comfortable if unspectacular, this centrally located guesthouse is friendly and serves vegetarian and traditional cooked breakfasts. It's a five-minute walk from the tourist office, near St Mary's church.

Castle View Hotel (☎620349; www.hotelchepstow.co.uk; Bridge St; s/d incl continental breakfast from £55/77) The fact that this old coach inn is probably the best hotel in town speaks volumes about the competition. Unspectacular but fine for a night, and directly opposite the castle.

Eating & Drinking

Two riverside places continue to serve good grub, round the corner from the tourist office.

Wye Knot (☎622929; The Back; lunch mains £3.50-10, dinner mains £10-16; 🕒lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Wed-Sat; closed Mon & Tue) Enjoy the likes of grilled red mullet or char-grilled swordfish in this contemporary restaurant. If you just want afternoon cream tea, it's yours for £3.95.

Boat Inn (☎628192; The Back; mains £6-16.25, 2-/3-course meal £111/13; 🕒lunch & dinner) Looking across to England, Chepstow's well-liked pub-restaurant tickles the tastebuds with classy platters specialising in fish.

Mamma Mia (☎622929; 29 High St; mains £7-17; 🕒dinner) It's modern styling for this pizza and pasta joint near the Gate House.

Getting There & Away

Regular National Express coach services visit Chepstow; coaches 508/509 to London (£18.50, three hours) and coach 201 to Cardiff (50 minutes) and Swansea (£9.40, two hours). Bus services include bus X14 to Bristol (£5.75, 50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) and bus 69 to Monmouth via Tintern (50 minutes, two hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

Trains serve Cardiff (£5.80, 40 minutes, at least every two hours) and Gloucester (£5.90, 30 minutes, at least every two hours).

AROUND CHEPSTOW

Tintern Abbey

On the banks of the River Wye sits this kaleidoscopic vision of a 14th-century **abbey** (Cadw; ☎01291-689251; adult/child £3.50/3; 🕒9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). With soaring walls, vast empty window frames and the huge space of the presbytery, all mottled in grey, pink and gold, it's easy to see how this former Cistercian house inspired both Turner and Wordsworth.

Founded in 1131 by Walter de Clare, the present building dates largely from the 14th century and functioned as an abbey until the Dissolution in 1536–40. Compared with other religious sites destroyed at the same time, a considerable amount remains.

The abbey gets oppressively busy so visit either early or late in the day to savour the peaceful atmosphere.

One mile upstream, the **tourist office** (☎ 01291-689566; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) is housed in old railway carriages. It can provide details of tranquil local walks.

Bus 69 makes the scenic journey from Chepstow (15 minutes) and Monmouth (35 minutes), every two hours (four on Sunday).

THE VALLEYS

South Wales is chock-full of attractions, but it's not all medieval castles and untouched coastline. North of Cardiff, and for decades a tourist no-go zone, the upland valleys tell of a time when a quarter of a million men were employed in iron and coal production.

Today, the only remnants of the 18th- and 19th-century Industrial Revolution are a few heritage sites (two not to be missed) and a collection of gruff towns and villages where populations still carry the burden of a shattered past. These are the places to discover Wales' most important recent history.

Blaenafon

☎ 01495 / pop 5626

In 2000 Unesco awarded World Heritage status to the village of Blaenafon, together with a large area of surrounding upland that was key to the iron trade.

Constructed in 1789, the **ironworks** (Cadw; ☎ 792615; adult/child £2.50/2; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, guided tours only Nov-Mar) were the largest and most advanced in the world. The scale of the works is mind-boggling, but the site is equally sobering as a graphic depiction of Wales' (and Britain's) lost industrial power; restoration continues slowly due to limited financial support. The **tourist office** (☎ 792615; www.blaenavontic.com) is based on-site – this is the place to arrange guided tours.

Ten minutes' walk away, **Big Pit Mining Museum** (☎ 790311; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm mid-Feb–Nov) is essential. Operational from 1880 to 1990, it's hard to call this an attraction in the traditional sense; what you see on the trip down the 90m shaft is the censored version of one of history's toughest occupations, and it's sure to leave an impression.

COOL CYMRU

For a nation dwarfed by its English neighbour, Wales has produced plenty of musical maestros who have hit the big time. Everyone knows perma-tanned warbler Tom Jones, who's been crooning to the ladies since the 1960s. Together with the likes of Shirley Bassey, he kept Welsh pop on the map for many a year.

In the 1980s the Alarm emerged as Wales' leading act, with a string of U2-inspired rock ballads to its name. More credible is John Cale, who split from the Velvet Underground to become a respected solo performer and producer.

Today it's guitar-driven bands that mainly rule the roost. Major chart names are indie-faves Stereophonics and nu-metallers Lostprophets, whilst the genre-defying Super Furry Animals are a gem. Not only did they produce the biggest-selling Welsh-language album of all time, the dreamy *Mwng,* they also recorded the most profane song ever to hit the British charts with 1996's disco-heavy stomp 'The Man Don't Give A Fuck' – the radio edit was a joy to behold. One exception to the guitar rule is Goldie Lookin' Chain, a group of foul-mouthed comedy-rappers from Newport who are the toast of teenage boys up and down the land.

Latterly, while syrupy poplets Charlotte Church and Jem have been clogging the airwaves, the newest feisty wave of energetic resistance is gathering pace. The Automatic are causing a storm with their brand of electro-disco-punk, while Bridgend quartet Bullet For My Valentine plays supercharged rock. Less full on, multi-instrumentalist Christopher Rees carries the troubadour torch with songs of loss and regret, and Euros Childs has shifted his unique folk sound from the sadly defunct Gorky's Zygotic Mynci into the solo arena.

Other much-loved bands now defunct (but still worth discovering) include Catatonia, the Pooh Sticks, Helen Love, 60ft Dolls, Big Leaves, Dub War and the Keys.

Blaenafon lies 15 miles north of Newport; catch bus 30 (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), bus 23 (55 minutes, hourly on Sunday), or bus X24 (50 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday).

The town is 8 miles from Abergavenny but there is no direct bus service.

Merthyr Tydfil

☎ 01685 / pop 35,488

At one time the epicentre of iron manufacture, depressed Merthyr Tydfil sits at the head of Taff Valley.

Poorly treated by concrete-obsessed town-planners and burdened with some of the worst unemployment figures in the country, Merthyr carries an ongoing legacy of the industrial collapse. As if to highlight its tough existence, memorial sculptures commemorate Johnny Owen, the heralded bantamweight boxer. Known as 'The Matchstick Man', the 24-year-old Owen died in 1980 after slipping into a coma following a fight in Los Angeles.

Several outlying industrial heritage sites deserve an afternoon visit, but there's no reason to stay overnight.

Merthyr's story unfolds in the museum at lavish **Cyfarthfa Castle** (☎ 723112; admission free; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Fri & noon-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), ex-home of the ironworks-owning Crawshay family, near the A470/A465 junction. Conversely, **Joseph Parry's Cottage** (☎ 723112; 4 Chapel Row; admission free; 🕒 2-5pm Thu-Sun Apr-Oct, by appointment with Cyfarthfa Castle museum Oct-Mar) is one of a line of tiny workers' cottages. Birthplace of the famous composer, it remains furnished with 1840s décor.

The **tourist office** (☎ 379884; 14a Glebeland St; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), by the bus station, has details on further sights and local walks. If you're feeling active, the **Taff Trail** (from Cardiff to Brecon) runs the length of the valley and is excellent for walking and straightforward biking.

Buses X4 and X40 link Merthyr to Cardiff (50 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday). The **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) runs on summer Sundays; see p697.

SWANSEA (ABERTAWE)

☎ 01792 / pop 270,506

Like many other 19th-century British towns, Swansea rose to prominence during the Industrial Revolution, when money flowed from local copper-smelters like water from the River Tawe to Swansea Bay.

But the money didn't flow forever and Swansea, Wales' second-largest city, tumbled towards stagnation – 'ugly lovely' was how Dylan Thomas characterised his childhood hometown. Today, bar a handful of ill-conceived concrete eyesores, things have changed as the city heads full-speed into the 21st century. Admittedly Parisians, New Yorkers and Romans can sleep easy, but it's now perfectly possible to stay in the city *and* have a good time.

Mooch through thought-provoking galleries, enjoy international cuisine, take in a game at the impressive new football stadium, admire quayside museums or go bananas with the riotous Wind St party crowd. And when you've done all that, the gorgeously wild Gower Peninsula is just on your doorstep.

Demonstrating this resurrection, 2006 saw two significant milestones. First, work started on an ambitious two-year overhaul of the public transport system. An extensive (and disruptive) programme of roadworks is preparing a streetcar network that will run between the city and Mumbles. Concurrently, the shabby bus terminal will receive a much-needed overhaul. Of more cultural interest was the prestigious National Eisteddfod, which came to town and showed that Swansea's artistic star continues to ascend.

Orientation & Information

The city centre is a half-mile walk southwest from the train station, along High St and the Kingsway. The bus station and tourist office are by the Quadrant shopping centre. Swansea University is 2 miles west along the seafront, while Irish ferries from Cork disembark across the Tawe to the east.

INTERNET ACCESS

Central Library (☎ 516750; Alexandra Rd; free internet access; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-8pm Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Bookings recommended.

LAUNDRY

Lendart Laundrette (☎ 644682; 91 Bryn-y-Mor Rd; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri; 8am-6pm Sat & Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Morriston Hospital (☎ 702222; Heol Maes Eglwys, Morriston) Accident & emergency department, 5 miles north of centre.

MONEY

Banks and ATMs abound along the Kingsway and Oxford St shopping area.

POST

Main post office (☎ 464140; 35 The Kingsway; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Central Tourist Office (☎ 468321; www.visitswanseabay.com; Plymouth St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) Books accommodation.

Mumbles Tourist Office (☎ 361302; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 12-5pm Sun Jun & Jul) Books accommodation on the Gower Peninsula.

Sights

MARITIME QUARTER

This area is converted from tired docks and re-branded in the style of wannabe waterside-chic. You can take a pleasant stroll here amid several worthwhile sights.

Ultramodern and unmissable, the **National Waterfront Museum** (☎ 638950; www.waterfrontmuseum.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) navigates Wales' industrial history and the impact of industrialisation on its people, from 1750 to the present day. Learn about the rise of coal, see how trade unions evolved and gauge the environmental impact of the Industrial Revolution in 15 innovative galleries that allow you to experience the ruthless realities of the time.

In contrast, elegant **Swansea Museum** (☎ 653763; Victoria Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), founded in 1834, is Wales' oldest museum. Exhibiting both the extraordinary and (very) ordinary aspects of Swansea's history, the muddled artefacts also include an Egyptian mummy.

The interesting **Dylan Thomas Centre** (☎ 463980; Somerset Place; 🕒 10am-4.30pm summer), off Somerset Place, charts the poet's enjoyable work, turbulent life and premature death. The small secondhand bookshop–café enhances the visit.

GLYNN VIVIAN ART GALLERY

Italianate in style, this inspirational **gallery** (☎ 655006; Alexandra Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) showcases Welsh talent, from the landscapes of Richard Wilson to the more contemporary work of Ceri Richards, plus international works and multimedia installations.

MUMBLES

Famous as the childhood home of actress Catherine Zeta Jones, the quaint seaside resort of Oystermouth lies at the far end of Swansea Bay. Known as Mumbles (after the French mariners' name for the headland's bosomy rocks, *mamelles*) the town has a popular ice-cream parlour, pier and the Mumbles Mile, a pub crawl starting here and taking in 11 boozers from the White Rose to the Pier.

A 1-mile trek over the headland leads to the sandy beaches of **Langland** and **Caswell Bays**.

Cycling

The national **Celtic Trail** route runs past Swansea's marina, heading around Swansea Bay to Mumbles. For a gentle trundle around the bay, hire bikes at **Action Bikes** (☎ 464640; 5 St David's Sq, St David's Shopping Centre).

Top-quality, purpose-built mountain-bike trails can be found at **Afan Argoed Forest Park** (☎ 01639-850564; www.mbwales.com), 12 miles northeast of Swansea off the A4107 (M4 J40).

Festivals & Events

Swansea Film Festival (www.swanseafilmfestival.com) 'Like Cannes….only closer' is the unconvincing tagline of this small but well-received bash, held in early June.

Swansea Fringe Festival (☎ 474051; www.swanseafringe.com) Open arts shindig with established names and unknowns alike. Enjoy music, theatre, comedy and film between September and early October.

Dylan Thomas Festival (☎ 463980; www.dylanthomasfestival.org) Held every 27 October to 9 November (Thomas' dates of birth and death), this celebrates Dylan Thomas' life through poetry and organised talks.

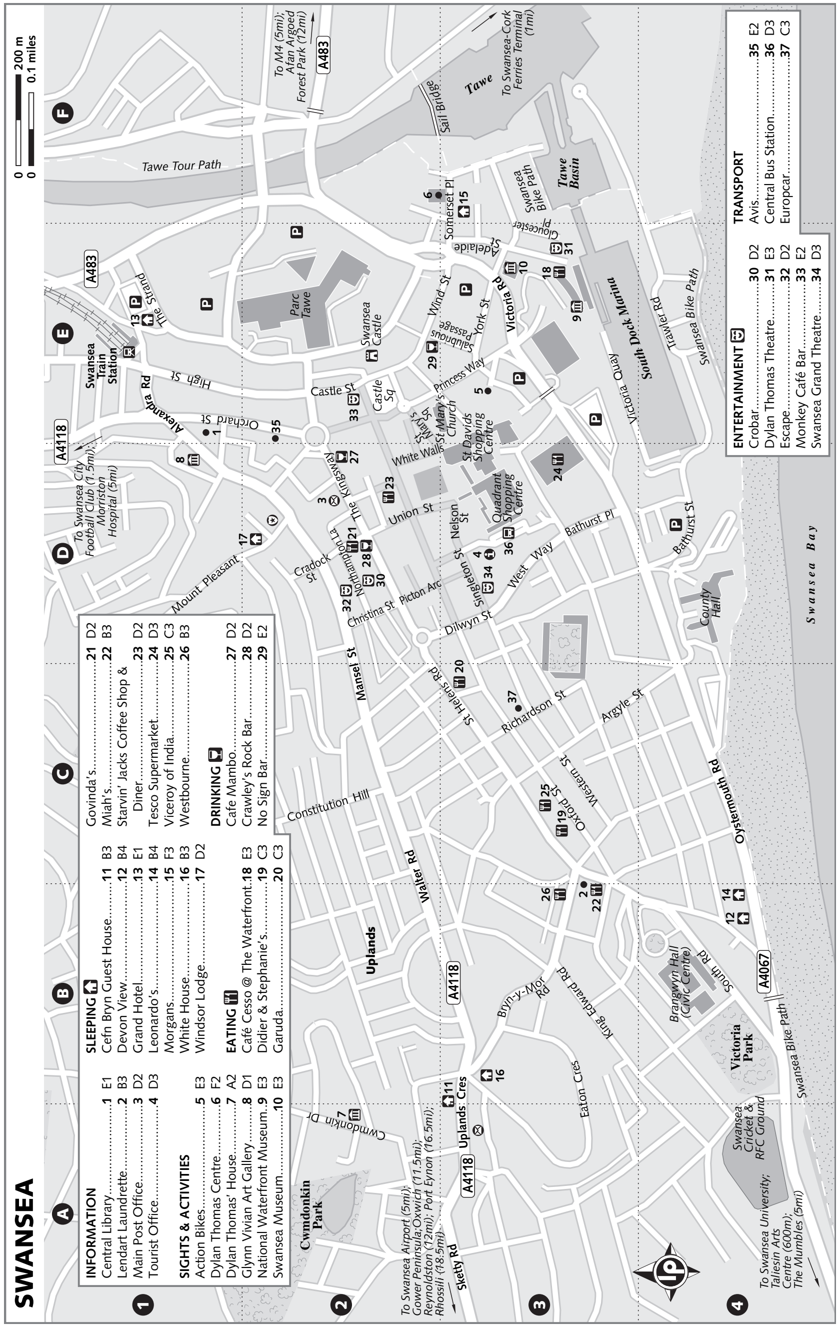
Sleeping

CENTRAL SWANSEA

Windsor Lodge (☎ 642158; Mt Pleasant; s/d weekday £65/75, weekend £50/65) Nothing much changes at 18th-century Windsor Lodge. It's still full of character, still close to the city centre and still a decent place to stay.

Grand Hotel (☎ 645898; www.thegrandhotelswansea.co.uk; Ivey Pl; d £75-155) Directly opposite the train station, the 1930s Grand has been renovated into a sleek four-star hotel boasting rooms with DVD player and power shower.

our pick **Morgans** (☎ 484848; www.morganshotel.co.uk; Somerset Pl; townhouse/hotel d from £75/125; wi-fi) Stained glass, wood panelling, Egyptian linen, goosedown duvets, flat-screen TVs, luxury bathrooms – the list goes on. Unashamedly Swansea's plushest residence, five-star Morgans opened the adjoining Townhouse in 2006, with contemporary rooms set in an extended Regency property.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Somerset Pl
Gloucester Pl
Adelaide St
Parc Tawe
The Strand
Swansea Train Station
High St
Swansea Castle
Wind St
York St
Victoria Rd
South Dock Marina
Trawler Rd
Swansea Bike Path
Victoria Quay
Castle St
Castle Sq
Princess Way
St Mary's Church
St Davids Shopping Centre
White Walls
Orchard St
Alexandra Rd
A4118
To Swansea City Football Club (1.5mi); Morriston Hospital (5mi)
The Kingsway
Union St
Quadrant Shopping Centre
Nelson St
Bathurst Pl
Bathurst St
Mount Pleasant
Cradock St
Northampton La
Christina St
Picton Arc
Singleton St
West Way
Dilwyn St
County Hall
Swansea Bay
Mansel St
St Helens Rd
Richardson St
Argyle St
Western St
Oxford St
Constitution Hill
Walter Rd
Oystermouth Rd
Uplands
A4118
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King Edward Rd
Brangwyn Hall (Civic Centre)
South Rd
A4067
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Swansea Cricket & RFC Ground
Swansea Bike Path
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Uplands Cres
Cwmdonkin Dr
Cwmdonkin Park
Sketty Rd
To Swansea Airport (5mi); Gower Peninsula;Oxwich (11.5mi); Reynoldston (12mi); Port Eynon (16.5mi); Rhossili (18.5mi)
To Swansea University; Taliesin Arts Centre (600m); The Mumbles (5mi)
A B C D E F
1 2 3 4

UPLANDS

The university neighbourhood of Uplands, a mile west of the centre, has a couple of cheaper recommendations.

Cefn Bryn Guest House (☎ 466687; www.cefnbryn.co.uk; 6 Uplands Cres; s/d from £35/70) Classic elegance meets modern design concepts in this imposing guesthouse set back from the road. With four single rooms, it's a good bet for the solo traveller.

White House (☎ 473856; www.thewhitehousehotel.co.uk; 4 Nyanza Tce; s/d from £42/72; 💻) Friendly, family-run hotel with a real homey feel and a restaurant that's commended for its use of Welsh produce.

OYSTERMOUTH ROAD

Oystermouth Rd is chock-full of seafront B&Bs, of which the following are the safest bet.

Devon View (☎ 462008; joseph@devonview.co.uk; 394 Oystermouth Rd; s/d £40/60, without bathroom £25/50) The kaleidoscopic décor might make your head spin but there's a friendly welcome and a good range of rooms to suit most budgets.

Leonardo's (☎ 470163; www.leonardosguesthouse.co.uk; 380 Oystermouth Rd; s/d from £43/56) The rooms at Leonardo's are less fussy, mixing soft pastel tones with the standard seaside chintz. If you're staying over the weekend, there are some great rates for Friday-to-Sunday stays.

MUMBLES

Mumbles has several places handy for both beach and nightlife.

Coast House (☎ 368702; www.thecoasthouse.co.uk; 708 Mumbles Rd; s/d £35/50) Traditional British B&B with great seafront aspect and big welcome.

Hillcrest House Hotel (☎ 363700; www.hillcresthousehotel.com; 1 Higher Lane; s/d £55/77.50) Has an excellent restaurant and themed rooms – from Scottish to safari – with leafy outlooks.

Patricks With Rooms (☎ 360199; www.patrickswithrooms.com; 638 Mumbles Rd; d £105; ⊠) Beautiful sea-view rooms with individual themes – from breezy sea-blues to full-on brilliant reds. There's also the recommended Patricks With Rooms Restaurant (see opposite).

Eating

Swansea's culinary scene is surprisingly rich.

CENTRAL SWANSEA

Café Cesso @ The Waterfront (☎ 456100; National Waterfront Museum; dishes £3-5; 🕒 10am-9pm) A large and airy addition to Swansea's café scene, Cesso serves the finest teas and coffees, and fresh smoothies. Kick back on the quayside terrace with a toasted panini away from the bustle of the city centre.

Govinda's (☎ 468469; 8 Craddock St; mains £4-10; 🕒 noon-3pm Mon-Thu, noon-6pm Fri & Sat) Wonderful vegetarian restaurant offering traditional dishes (lasagne, moussaka) with an Indian twist. It also does takeaway and you can even take a yoga class or learn about Indian scriptures.

Starvin' Jacks Coffee Shop & Diner (☎ 457453; 21 Park St; dishes around £4) Friendly no-frills café offering good portions of healthy grub. If you want a jacket potato or baguette with a twist (chicken tikka, mayo and melted cheese?), then this popular student fave is a good bet.

Tesco (☎ 0845 677 9662; Oystermouth Rd; 🕒 8am Mon-midnight Sat; 10am-4pm Sun) A 24-hour supermarket on Oystermouth Rd.

ST HELEN'S ROAD

Multicultural St Helen's Rd has several worthwhile eateries.

Miah's (☎ 466244; St Paul's Church, St Helen's Rd; mains around £5-9; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This converted church hall takes the award for the most spectacular Indian restaurant, but the food is absolutely deserving of the grand venue.

DYLAN THOMAS IN SWANSEA

'If I had been born and brought up in an igloo and lived on whales, not in it…it would have been extremely unlikely I become a writer' wrote Dylan Thomas in 1952, a year before his death at age 39. The wit and wisdom of Wales' foremost 20th-century poet gained international accolades; his best-known work was the rhythmic, comic radio-play of affectionate characters, *Under Milk Wood*.

Dylan Thomas' birthplace and home at 5 Cwmdonkin Dr in Uplands is being refurbished privately, but the leaseholders (muddy@clynefarm.com) will occasionally open it by arrangement.

Both the tourist office and the Dylan Thomas Centre have plenty of Thomas material; there's even a Dylan trail (see www.dylanthomas.org) and Dylan Thomas Festival (p668), during which you may catch a performance of *Under Milk Wood*. If you want more, head to Laugharne (p674) to see the boathouse where Thomas spent his final years.

Westbourne (☎ 476637; 1 Bryn-y-Mor Rd; mains around £5-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This old pub recently underwent a dramatic face-lift, resulting in Swansea's first self-styled gastropub. The food isn't a revelation, focusing on honest staple dishes, but it's a good option if you don't want the formality of a restaurant.

Viceroy of India (☎ 466898; 50 St Helen's Rd; mains around £7-10; 🕒 to midnight) Another place with respected subcontinental dishes, the Viceroy might lack the grandeur of Miah's, but with your face buried in a steaming curry you won't notice at all.

Garuda (☎ 653388; 18 St Helen's Rd; mains £8-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat; ⊠) Tiny shack of a place infused with Eastern scents and brimming with Indonesian delights cooked with coconut milk and chillies. Bring your own wine. Bookings recommended.

Didier & Stephanie's (☎ 655603; 56 St Helen's Rd; mains around £12; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) D&S consistently comes near the top of polls for good local restaurants, offering a range of French-themed dishes and a good-value lunch menu that's as tasty as the evening selection.

MUMBLES

In the Mumbles area, one place merits special mention.

Patricks With Rooms (638 Mumbles Rd; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun; mains £14.50-19.20) Pleasantly situated by the bay, Patricks creates a casual bar-restaurant ambience but serves top-quality food such as honey-roasted duck, fresh fish, and tandoori vegetable pancakes. For pud, the knickerbocker glory is an old-school wonder.

Drinking

Wind St is where it all happens. Amid the bedlam there are one or two jewels, but you may have to look harder for real quality.

No Sign Bar (☎ 465300; 56 Wind St) Old wine-bar institution that's managing to survive amid the modern throng, although the atmosphere can suffer as a result.

Cafe Mambo (☎ 456620; 46 The Kingsway) Funky and colourful, Mambo breathes Latin spirit into Swansea. Open-sided in summer and with good tequila.

Crawley's Rock Bar (Craddock St) Low-down and mean, this dark place is popular with the hard-rock crowd.

The Mumbles Mile is an oft-messy and perennially popular student pub crawl, starting in Mumbles and taking in 11 boozers from the White Rose to the Pier.

Entertainment

Buzz magazine (free from the tourist office or bars) has club and live music listings.

LIVE MUSIC

Monkey Café Bar (☎ 480822; www.monkeycafé.co.uk; 13 Castle St; admission up to £5; 🕒 to 2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri, Sat & Sun) Student hang-out Monkey has two floors of independent sounds, live bands and DJs covering all musical bases.

NIGHTCLUBS

Crobar (☎ 477929; 1 Northampton Lane; admission £5; 🕒 9pm-3am Fri & Sat, 9pm-1am Sun) Hard house and rave classics draw a pumped-up townie crowd.

Escape (☎ 652854; Northampton Lane; admission £6-12; 🕒 10pm-3am Thu-Sat) Trance, house and urban choons spread through three rooms. Resident DJs, as well as big-name guests.

THEATRE

Swansea Grand Theatre (☎ 475715; www.swansea.gov.uk/grandtheatre; Singleton St) Council-operated auditorium presenting everything from ballet to pantomime.

Dylan Thomas Theatre (☎ 473238; www.dylanthomastheatre.org.uk; Gloucester Pl) Not surprisingly, this place specialises in performances of Thomas' work.

Taliesin Arts Centre (☎ 296883; www.taliesinartscentre.co.uk; Singleton Park) Theatre, dance, live music and film at the university campus, 2 miles west of the city down Mumbles Rd.

SPORT

Swansea City Football Club (☎ tourist tickets 08700 400 004; www.swanseacity.premiumtv.co.uk; Liberty Stadium; adult £13-18, child £7-10) This impressive stadium in Morfa opened in 2005, and also hosts rugby matches and international fixtures.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Swansea Cork Ferries (☎ 456116; www.swanseacorkferries.com) sails to Cork (Ireland) four to six times weekly from mid-March to January. Fares are seasonal: foot passengers £46 in low season to £68 in high season; five-day return for car, driver and five passengers is £170 to £270. The terminal lies a mile east of the centre.

BUS

All local and long-distance bus services start and terminate at the central bus station. The First shuttle bus 100 (£6, one hour, half-hourly Monday to Friday, hourly on Saturday, four on Sunday) serves Cardiff. National Express coach NX508 runs regularly from London (£22, five hours), continuing to Haverfordwest (£7.30, 2¼ hours, three daily).

TRAIN

Trains from Swansea serve Cardiff (£7.70, 50 minutes, half-hourly) and London Paddington (£58, three hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday), and to Fishguard (£9.30, 1½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday), connecting with Irish ferries.

The famous Heart of Wales line (p694) terminates in Swansea.

Getting Around

The First Swansea Bay Tourist ticket (daily/weekly £3.60/14.40) covers bus journeys in and around Swansea, the Gower Peninsula and a way up the Swansea Valley. Buy it on the bus.

For car hire, try **Avis** (☎ 460939; NCP Car Park, Orchard St) and **Europcar** (☎ 0870 607 5000; 187-189 Lower Oxford St).

GOWER PENINSULA

☎ 01792

Precipitous cliff-top walks, sweeping golden sands, untamed uplands and top surfing mean this 15-mile spit is perennially popular. Wild and windswept, it sometimes feels more like an island than a peninsula, and seems a million miles removed from Swansea's urban life.

Its proximity to the city means that the more popular areas get crowded during summer, and accommodation should be booked in advance. Despite this, it's usually possible to escape the hordes and find solitude amid beautiful scenery.

Use the tourist offices at Swansea or Mumbles (p668) for information, brochures and accommodation options.

The National Trust (NT) owns 26 miles of Gower coast and operates a **visitor centre** (☎ 390707; Rhossili; 🕐 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Mar–Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov–mid-March).

Sights

On the south coast, sandy **Oxwich Bay** adjoins Oxwich Nature Reserve. Further west is the family-magnet beach of **Port Eynon**.

At the tip of the peninsula the village of Rhossili looks north along 3-mile long **Rhossili Bay**, the Gower's best beach and surf spot (below). Access and facilities lie at the northern end at **Llangennith**. Further north around Bluepool Corner are **Whitfords Sands**.

From Rhossili village it's possible to walk the tidal causeway to rocky, wave-blasted **Worm's Head** (from Old English *wurm,* meaning dragon) but *only* for a two-hour period at low tide. A **sea-bird colony** on the Outer Head includes razorbills, guillemots, kittiwakes, fulmars, puffins and oystercatchers, while seals often bob in the swell.

Above the village of **Reynoldston**, a colossal 25-ton quartz boulder is the fallen capstone of a Neolithic burial chamber known as **Arthur's Stone**. **Cefn Bryn** (185m) in the central uplands affords sweeping 360-degree views of the Gower.

Surfing

Some of Britain's best surf is at Rhossili Bay. For surfing tuition try the **Surf School** (☎ 386426; www.wsfsurfschool.co.uk; 2hr class £20) at Llangennith.

Gower Surfing Development (☎ 360370; www.gowersurfing.com; 2hr class £30) does beginner courses at Caswell Bay and Llangennith. For local surf conditions check **Surfline** (☎ 0901 603 1 603; www.llangennithsurf.com).

Surfers also head for Rotherslade and Langland Bays and Caswell Bay, near Mumbles.

Sleeping

The Gower isn't blessed with copious accommodation, but there are worthwhile options.

PORT EYNON

Carreglwyd Park (☎ 390795; www.carreglywd.com; 2-person tent sites £15-17; 🕐 Mar-Dec) For camping close to the beach, try this spot.

Port Eynon YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5998; porteynon@yha.org.uk; dm £14) One rung further up the ladder, this hostel occupies an old lifeboat house by the broad sands.

Highmead (☎ 390300; www.highmead-gower.co.uk; s/d from £27/55) Has crisp rooms with great sea views.

OXWICH VILLAGE

Oxwich Bay Hotel (☎ 390329; www.oxwichbayhotel.co.uk; s/d from £55/66, d with sea view from £72) With decent-size en suite rooms offering big sea views, this hotel is a bit floral but perfectly comfortable. It has a pleasant garden.

LLANGENNITH

Hillend Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 386204; 3-person tent sites £12-18; 🕐 Apr-Oct) Hillend is a surfer's haunt behind the beach; it gets packed-out when the weather and/or surf's good and doesn't take advance bookings.

Hardingsdown Bunkhouse (☎ 386222; www.bunkhousegower.co.uk; dm £15) A beautifully renovated stable on a working farm.

Western House (☎ 386620; www.llangennith.freeserve.co.uk; d £40) This is a bright, colourful and busy family home.

College House (☎ 386214; s/d £35/50) Backs onto the village church and contains interesting sculptures.

OTHER AREAS

Kennexstone Campsite (☎ 386790; www.gowercamping.co.uk; 2-person tent sites £10; 🕐 Easter-Sep) Kennexstone is located slightly inland at Llanmadoc.

King Arthur Hotel (☎ 390775; d £65-90) Also inland, at Reynoldston, this hotel is a traditional pub with log fires, en suite rooms and decent grub.

Getting There & Around

Buses run from Swansea station to Gower destinations every hour or two (fewer services on Sunday). Buses 116 and 118 serve Oxwich, Port Eynon, Reynoldston, Rhossili and Llangennith. Take bus 119 on Sunday.

The First Swansea Bay Tourist ticket (daily/weekly £3.60/14.40) covers multiple journeys. Buy it on the bus.

CARMARTHEN (CAERFYRDDIN)

☎ 01267 / pop 14,648

Carmarthenshire's county town is the alleged birthplace of Arthurian legend Merlin the Magician. Unfortunately that's the only legendary thing about this otherwise uninspiring place.

There are several worthwhile excursions in the immediate area, including the National Botanic Garden, Dylan Thomas' old haunt Laugharne and the spectacular Carreg Cennen Castle. Carmarthen's own castle, long dilapidated, is currently undergoing an enhancement scheme and is closed to the public. The **tourist office** (☎ 231557; 113 Lammas St; 🕐 10am-5.15pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4.15pm Oct-Easter) is in the centre of town.

Getting There & Away

Bus X11 links Carmarthen with Swansea (1½ hours, half-hourly, every two hours on Sunday); and bus 322 serves Haverfordwest (£3.85, one hour, twice daily Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday).

The summer **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) links Carmarthen with Brecon, via the National Botanic Garden; see p697 for more information.

TrawsCambria coach X40 (Cardiff to Aberystwyth) stops several times daily in Carmarthen, as does National Express coach 508 or 528 (Haverfordwest to Swansea).

Trains to Carmarthen run from Swansea (£5.70, 45 minutes, hourly, daily) and Cardiff (£11.90, 1¾ hours, at least hourly).

AROUND CARMARTHEN

National Botanic Garden (Gardd Fotaneg Genedlaethol)

You don't need to have a green thumb to enjoy Wales' foremost **garden** (☎ 01558-668768; www.gardenofwales.org.uk; adult/child Easter-Oct £7.50/3, Nov-Easter £5/free; 🕐 10am-6pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Easter), set in the rolling Georgian estate of Middleton Hall and twice the size of London's Kew Gardens.

Contemporary architecture and ingenious landscaping blend with plants that are displayed with a delicate flair. Impressive features include a 200m rivulet and fountain, while the centrepiece is the 100m-wide **Great Glasshouse**. Recessed in the hillside, the temperate dome houses endangered plants from exotic climes, including South Africa and Australia. Child-friendly attractions include a maize maze and tempting willow dens.

The garden is 7 miles east of Carmarthen, 1.5 miles north of the A48 on the B4310. Take bus 166 from Carmarthen (25 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday). **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) runs on Sundays during summer months; see p697.

LAUGHARNE (LACHARN)

☎ 01994 / pop 2940

Dylan Thomas is a name synonymous with south Wales and one of the tourist industry's greatest assets. The poet and writer spent his final years in this good-looking coastal town.

Stroll along the Taff Estuary to Thomas' seafront home, check out his gorgeously located summer house and visit St Martin's churchyard, his final resting place. It is believed that Laugharne inspired the fictional town of 'Llareggub' (say it backwards), which was the setting for *Under Milk Wood* (1954).

WORTH THE TRIP

Remote **Carreg Cennen Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 01558-822291; adult/child £3.50/3; ⏲ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) is Wales' most spectacular fortress, perched high on a limestone bluff near the pretty town of Llandeilo. Visible for miles around, this is the ultimate romantic ruin.

So isolated that its military role was minimal, the castle was a consummate symbol of power and pride. It is believed that a stronghold existed here in the time of Rhys ap Gruffydd, who as 12th-century ruler of the Kingdom of Deheubarth overturned many of the territorial gains of the Normans. The castle you see today is 13th-century, built during the course of Edward I's conquest of Wales. Yorkist troops contesting the Wars of the Roses largely dismantled the stronghold in 1462.

It sits 100m above the valley floor and there's a lung-bursting climb to reach the summit, but the panoramic views across wild, pea-green hills justify the effort. The other major attraction is the spooky **Cliff Gallery**, a dark and lonely corridor tracing the southern cliff face to a natural cave. It was thought to be part of the castle defences, and you can test your bravery by inching in as far as you dare. Bring a torch (or hire one from the farm shop) but check the batteries are good!

Although Carreg Cennen is within the Brecon Beacons National Park, access is simplest from Carmarthenshire. Llandeilo lies on the Heart of Wales railway line between Swansea (55 minutes) and Llandrindod Wells (75 minutes), and the narrow, hilly streets are worth exploring for a couple of hours.

Combine a visit to the castle with a meal at **Carolita's Mexican Cantina** (☎ 01558-822908; mains £7-8; ⏲ lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Thu-Sun). Hailing from southern Texas, and arriving in Llandeilo via Mexico, Carolita serves up some of the best grub for miles around – homemade tacos, nachos and enchiladas are plentiful and cut a fiery zing. Mexican decorations (some for sale) send you south of the border, while the welcome's as warm as the food is hot.

The castle is easiest reached by car, but you can also ask that the train stop at Ffairfach, from where it's a hilly 3.5-mile walk.

After his death, the ever-conservative BBC altered the spelling to 'Llaregyb'.

You can visit the remains of the 12th-century **castle** (Cadw; ☎ 427906; adult/child £2.90/2.50; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) but most want the spiritual literary experience. Today a 21st-century celebrity, actor Neil Morrissey, haunts the village and owns several local properties.

Dylan Thomas Boathouse

Perched on the cliff with splendid views across the bay, the **boathouse** (☎ 427420; adult/child £3.50/2.75; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm May-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Nov-Apr) is a gentle stroll from town, either via a seafront path by the castle or, higher up, along a leafy lane.

Thomas passed his final four years here with his wife Caitlin, and the house is preserved as a shrine, with photographs, manuscripts and recordings of the poet reading from his own works. From the terrace tearoom of the house you can survey his 'heron priested shore'.

Above the boathouse sits 'The Shack', the cabin where Thomas wrote *Under Milk Wood*. Peek through the window and it looks as if he's just nipped out for a pint. The décor is (supposedly) just as it used to be.

Sleeping & Eating

Laugharne has a number of respectable accomodation and dining options.

Coach House B&B (☎ 427992; Market Lane; s/d £35/50) Exposed wooden beams, bare stone walls and a terrace with winning views in the former castle coach house. Central location *and* great privacy.

Dylan's By The Bay (☎ 427909; Victoria St; d £80) Two rooms offer spacious accommodation and sweeping estuary views – you can even take a soak in the Jacuzzi.

New Three Mariners (☎ 427426; Victoria St; mains £4-10, 3-course Sunday lunch £10; ⏲ lunch & dinner) No amount of beige paint, chocolate-coloured wood or 'coffee-bar' similes can hide the fact that this is really a pretty regular pub. Decent bar food though.

Owl & The Pussycat Tearooms (☎ 427742; Grist Sq; mains £7-12) Curiously decorated with a range of owls and cats in wicker, wood and porcelain, this is a good choice for traditional afternoon tea, as well as something more substantial.

Stable Door Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 427777; Market Lane; mains £12-17; ⏲ dinner Thu-Sat) Probably Laugharne's classiest eatery, with tasty morsels including Welsh steak, lamb, fish and tempting veggie options. Alternatively, just stop for a glass of whatever you fancy.

Getting There & Away

Bus 222 runs from Carmarthen (35 minutes, two-hourly Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK

Rocky, sandy, sparkling and remote, the wonders of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park are unmissable. Covering 230 sq miles in the far-flung southwest, the park sits firmly in a region that the inhabitants proudly refer to as west Wales.

The stunning coastline is typified by soaring cliffs and vast swaths of golden beach, virtually all of which is encompassed within the park's boundaries and set against a backdrop of boiling surf or sheltered crystal coves.

Offshore boat trips run to the islands of Skomer, Skokholm, Grassholm and Ramsey to visit the huge colonies of raucous sea birds. Elsewhere, from countless rocky promontories on the northern coast, you can spot resident bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, together with migrating dolphins and minke whales.

Punctuating the vista are chocolate-box seaside towns such as Newport, Fishguard and St David's, Britain's smallest city, whose historic, earthquake-wobbled cathedral is Wales' holiest site.

Walkers flock to tramp the fabled Pembrokeshire Coast Path, which can be broken into several memorable day-hikes. Adrenaline junkies get their kicks with rock climbing, kayaking, surfing and diving, whilst the pulse-juddering sport of coasteering goes from strength to strength. Inland, the park extends to the Preseli Hills (535m); crisscrossed by ancient trade routes and dotted with prehistoric remains, this is mountain-biking country.

Holidaymaking is central to Pembrokeshire's identity, particularly along the south coast. This area is known as 'Little England' – more than 50 castles here were built by the Anglo-Norman invaders and today many guesthouses are run by English settlers.

The rugged north coast is more Welsh, with a delightfully remote shoreline accessible down dead-end roads and along the coast path.

Orientation & Information

The park (www.pcnpa.org.uk) has four sections: the coastline east of Fishguard to Cardigan and inland to the Preseli Hills; the coastline west of Fishguard and south round to Milford Haven (including the islands of Skomer, Skokholm, Grassholm and Ramsey); the inland stretches of the Milford Haven waterway; and the coastline around the southern Pembroke peninsula. Oil terminals along the industrial estuary of Milford Haven disqualify this waterway from the national park.

Major tourist offices are at Tenby, Pembroke, Haverfordwest, **St David's** (☎ 720392; enquiries@stdavids.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk; The Grove), Fishguard and Newport. On arrival, pick up a free copy of *Coast to Coast*, the excellent park visitor newspaper.

For the local weather forecast call **Weathercall** (☎ 09068-500409).

Activities

Pembrokeshire's tourist offices are well informed and carry useful brochures and route maps for all the activities listed in this section. Two valuable publications are the free newspapers *Coast to Coast* and *Activity Wales*, which have events listings and further activity details.

ACTIVITY CENTRES

Pembrokeshire has two well-established centres offering fully-equipped sea kayaking, surfing and coasteering adventures.

Preseli Venture (☎ 01348-837709; www.preseliventure.com; Mathry; half/full-day/full-board weekend from £45/89/189) is a super-friendly adults-only centre in a stunning north-coast location. Join a weekend course and enjoy the comfy lodge, complete with cosy bar, pool table and tasty hot meals. At the time of research a new wing was under construction, due to open early in 2007 and offering basic accommodation (see p686). Find it at Mathry, on the A487 between Fishguard and St David's.

St David's-based **TYF Adventure** (Twr-y-Felin; ☎ 01437-721611; www.tyf.com; 1 High St; half/full-day/full-board weekend £45/85/190) takes under-16s on its courses, all of which start from its Twr Y Felin Hotel (p685). From South Pembrokeshire, contact TYF at Freshwater East (☎ 01646-672764).

BOAT TRIPS

Get up close and personal with Pembrokeshire's sea life on a boat around the islands – Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm lie off St Brides Bay, while Ramsey Island is off the northerly St David's peninsula. Further south, boats from Tenby head to Caldey Island.

Whichever operator you choose, make sure it adheres to the Pembrokeshire Marine Code, designed to protect the fragile park environment.

CYCLING

Cycling on the coast path itself is prohibited (as it is on all footpaths in Britain) but just inland are countless country lanes and 320 miles of bridleways to explore, so alternative options are plentiful.

The **Celtic Trail** national cycle route is at its best on the coast between Broad Haven (near Haverfordwest), St David's and Fishguard. Get details from **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.sustrans.org.uk). For more on Sustrans and the National Cycle Network see p88.

Gentle mountain biking can be found in Canaston Woods near Narbeth, while the bridleways of the Preseli Hills offer tougher upland routes (p689). **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 01239-820773/330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15) supplies bikes and routes for the north coast and Preseli Hills.

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

This is an ideal area for riding – either along the beaches, across open moors or high up in the Preseli Hills – and there are a dozen stables in or near the park. Ask at a tourist office for your local centre.

SEA SPORTS

Pembrokeshire has been blessed not only with spectacular coastal scenery but also reliable surfing. Easily accessible hot spots include Newgale and Freshwater West, and (most popular) Whitesands Bay near St David's.

You can easily hire and buy equipment, or simply arrange tuition. Try **Whitesands Surf School** (☎ 01437-720433; www.whitesandssurfschool.co.uk; High St; 2hr class £25), based at Ma Sime's Surf Hut in St David's, or **Outer Reef** (☎ 01646-680070; www.outerreefsurfschool.com; 2½/5hr class £25/35), which moves from beach to beach with the best waves.

As well as surfing, **West Wales Wind, Surf & Sailing** (☎ 01646-636642; www.surfdale.co.uk), based at Newgale, also offers windsurfing, dinghy sailing, canoeing and powerboating.

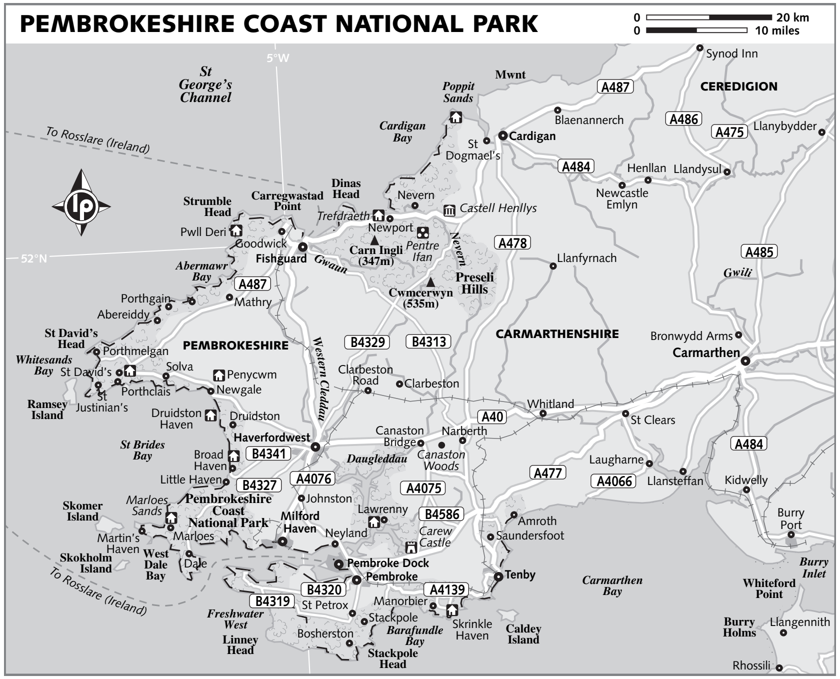
You can also enjoy canoeing and surfing at Preseli Venture and TYF activity centres (p675).

If you prefer scuba diving, see rich marine life and several local wrecks with **West Wales Diving Centre** (☎ 01437-781457; www.westwalesdivers.co.uk; Hasguard Cross), near Little Haven, or **Celtic Diving** (☎ 01348-871938; www.celticdiving.co.uk; Goodwick Parrog), based by the Fishguard ferry terminal.

Newgale on St Brides Bay has one of the best beaches in Wales for **fishing**.

As exciting as all these are, Pembrokeshire's true star attraction is coasteering (above), a crazy mix of climbing, diving and swimming. Try it with Preseli Venture or TYF.

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK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St George's Channel
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To Rosslare (Ireland)
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Cardigan Bay
Blaenannerch
A486
A475
Llanybydder
Cardigan
St Dogmael's
A484
Henllan
Llandysul
Dinas Head
Nevern
Newcastle Emlyn
Strumble Head
Carregwastad Point
Trefdraeth
Castell Henllys
Newport
Pwll Deri
Goodwick
Fishguard
Gwaun
Carn Ingli (347m)
Pentre Ifan
Nevern
A478
A485
Llanfyrnach
Abermawr Bay
Preseli Hills
Gwili
A487
Mathry
Cwmcerwyn (535m)
Porthgain
Abereiddy
St David's Head
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PEMBROKESHIRE
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CARMARTHENSHIRE
Bronwydd Arms
Carmarthen
Whitesands Bay
St David's
Solva
Penycwm
Newgale
Clarbeston Road
Clarbeston
St Justinian's
Porthclais
Western Cleddau
Whitland
Ramsey Island
Druidston Haven
Druidston
A40
St Clears
Haverfordwest
Canaston Bridge
Narberth
St Brides Bay
Broad Haven
B4341
Daugleddau
Canaston Woods
A484
Laugharne
Little Haven
B4327
A4076
A477
A4066
Llansteffan
Kidwelly
A4075
Skomer Island
Marloes Sands
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Johnston
Lawrenny
B4586
Burry Port
Martin's Haven
Marloes
Milford Haven
Neyland
Carew Castle
Amroth
Saundersfoot
Skokholm Island
West Dale Bay
Dale
Pembroke Dock
Pembroke
Tenby
Burry Inlet
Carmarthen Bay
B4320
A4139
Whiteford Point
B4319
St Petrox
Manorbier
Freshwater West
Stackpole
Skrinkle Haven
Caldey Island
Burry Holms
Llangennith
Linney Head
Bosherston
Barafundle Bay
Stackpole Head
Rhossili

COASTEERING & SEA KAYAKING

If you fancy a spot of rock climbing, gully scrambling, cave exploration, wave riding and cliff jumping, all rolled together, then try coasteering. More or less conceived on the Pembrokeshire coast, this demanding activity is the mainstay of the local adventure-sports scene. It's also risky, so take guidance from an instructor and don't be tempted to take flight from the nearest precipice.

Pembrokeshire also has some of Britain's finest sea kayaking, suitable for all levels. Powerful tidal currents generate large standing waves between the coast and offshore islands; novice paddlers can splash around the sheltered coves. Everybody, experienced or not, can revel in the beautiful cliffscapes (rock stacks, caves and idyllic bays) and wildlife (porpoises and birds) from the water – without an outboard motor in sight.

WALKING

The 186-mile clifftop **Pembrokeshire Coast Path** hugs the shoreline between Amroth on the south coast and Poppit Sands near Cardigan on the north coast. En route you can discover over 50 bathing beaches, 40 Iron Age forts and countless hidden coves. The rise and fall of the cliffs adds to the challenge; 15 days is a good estimate for the total distance, but most people do shorter sections. Suggestions for good walks include Dale to Martin's Haven near Marloes, and Solva to Whitesands Bay on St David's peninsula.

Recommended is the detailed *Pembrokeshire Coast Path* by Brian John (£12.99), available from tourist offices, together with leaflets breaking the walk into shorter sections. From the park website (www.pcnpa.org.uk) you can also download route maps for 95 circular walks.

Accommodation is always close to the route and youth hostels are often spaced a day's hike apart, but book ahead between Easter and September. Tourist offices can help you plan where to stay.

The route is covered by two Ordnance Survey *Explorer OL* 1:25,000 maps: No 35 (North Pembrokeshire) and No 36 (South Pembrokeshire).

Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Services (p678) operates daily from June to September (three times a week in winter), allowing access to more remote coast-path sections and circular walks.

Sleeping

B&Bs and hotels are plentiful in the park, especially around the well-developed south coast (www.visitpembrokeshire.co.uk).

There are nine YHA hostels: Manorbier (p679), Lawrenny, Marloes Sands (p682), Broad Haven (p682), Penycwm (p682), St David's (p685), Pwll Deri (p686), Trefdraeth (Newport; p688) and Poppit Sands (p690).

Fishguard has the Hamilton Backpackers (p687).

It always pays to book ahead between Easter and September, and especially from June to August (the main holiday period for Brits).

Getting There & Around

Frequent West Wales railway services from Swansea (connections for Cardiff and London's Paddington) run to Pembrokeshire's major transport hubs, Haverfordwest (£9.30, 1½ hours) and, for Irish ferries, Pembroke Dock (£9.20, 2¼ hours). National Express coach 508 runs from London to Haverfordwest (£25.50, seven hours, three times daily).

Once in Pembrokeshire, use buses to get around rather than trains but note that Sunday services are limited, especially from October to April. The West Wales Rover (£6) is a one-day ticket valid on most buses in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion – buy it on the bus. For details of the multiday Freedom of South Wales Flexi-Rover ticket, which includes trains, see p662.

Pembrokeshire has a second Irish ferry port at Fishguard. Take bus 412 (30 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) from Haverfordwest to Fishguard Sq, and then bus 410 (five minutes, every half-hour Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) to Goodwick.

Between May and September a collective of local buses constitute **Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Services** (☎ 01234-567890; www.pembrokeshiregreenways.co.uk). The Poppit Rocket, Preseli Green Dragon, Strumble Shuttle, Celtic Coaster, Puffin Shuttle and Coastal Cruiser ply the coast-path roads daily, picking up and setting down at any safe point.

Between October and March, a reduced service (Poppit Rocket, Strumble Shuttle, Puffin Shuttle and Coastal Cruiser only) operates three days a week.

You can use the West Wales Rover ticket on these services. Tourist offices stock timetables and information is also published in the free *Coast to Coast* newspaper.

TENBY (DINBYCH Y PYSGOD)

☎ 01834 / pop 4934

With attractive architecture, 13th-century fortifications and B&Bs galore, Tenby might seem like the perfect seaside town. But that doesn't tell the whole story. If Jekyll and Hyde had lived in Wales, the faded-pastel splendour of this Victorian resort would have been their Utopia, such is its capacity to entrance and appal with equal measure.

Generations of holidaying Brits have chosen Pembrokeshire's foremost seaside town for their summer hols, attracted by golden sands, a sheltered harbour and superbly located castle, and why not? Wandering the narrow medieval streets of the old town is a captivating experience, never more so than on a warm spring morning (hello Dr Jekyll).

But spring turns to summer and with it Tenby shatters your serenity like a Welsh bull on steroids. Suddenly the town is full to bursting. Kiddies scream, dads shout, the beach heaves and boozy hen and stag parties leave chunky, spattered calling cards in the streets (welcome Mr Hyde).

Time your visit right and Tenby enthrals. Get it wrong and you might wish you never came.

Orientation & Information

Tenby's major landmark is the headland of Castle Hill, site of the Norman stronghold. On the north side is the harbour and North Beach. On the southern side is little Castle Sands, then long South Beach. The train station, on Warren St, is on the western side of town, with the bus station one block further south, at Upper Park Rd.

The **tourist office** (☎ 842404; tenbytouristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; The Croft; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter–late-May, 10am-5.30pm late-May–Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) is by Somerfield supermarket.

Sights & Activities

Popular boat rides bob the 20 minutes to **Caldey Island** (☎ 844453; www.caldey-island.co.uk; adult/child £9/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat May-Sep), one-time home of Cistercian monks and enduring haunt of grey seals and Wales' largest cormorant colony.

Twice-daily guided tours explore the monastery and the island has attractive walking. Boats depart (every 15 to 20 minutes in high season) from the quay at high tide and Castle Sands at low tide. Buy tickets at the harbour kiosk.

Handsomely restored, Tenby's 15th-century **Tudor Merchant's House** (NT; ☎ 842279; Quay Hill; adult/child £2.50/1.20; 🕒 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Easter-Oct) has period furnishings and the remains of early frescoes on the interior walls.

The castle ruins house **Tenby Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 842809; Castle Hill; adult/child £3/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Dec, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Jan-Easter), which tells the town's story through period exhibitions and paintings by the likes of Augustus and Gwen John.

For a guided walk with a variety of themes (for example ghosts, pirates or the story of Tenby) contact **Town Trails** (☎ 845841; walks £3.75; 🕒 Mon-Sat Jun-Sep & holidays); it also offers Halloween and Christmas specials.

Sleeping

Tenby overflows with classic seaside B&Bs and hotels. The nearest YHA hostel is about 6 miles west at Manorbier.

Meadow Farm (☎ 844829; per person on foot £6; 🕒 Easter-Sep) The best of Tenby's camp sites, this is a simple coastal site (on a bit of a slope) with showers, five minutes' walk north of town.

Glenholme (☎ 843909; Picton Tce; s/d from £30/37) Tenby can be pricey so here's a cheaper place that offers en suite rooms. There are no sea views, but it's central – find it off South Beach Esplanade by the Tenby bowling green.

Castle View (☎ 842666; www.castleviewhotel.co.uk; The Norton; d from £60; 🚭) On the North Shore seafront, Castle View has a winning location and, amid a sea of frills and flounce, offers en suite rooms that are comparatively tasteful.

Kinloch Court Hotel (☎ 842777; www.kinlochcourthotel.co.uk; Queens Pde; s/d from £65/84; 🚭) Perched above the South Shore, this is a beautiful former rectory converted into understated accommodation with en suite rooms and sweeping views across the bay. Rooms are spacious, although the décor doesn't quite match the splendour of the exterior.

Eating & Drinking

Tenby's old town has a clutch of welcoming eateries.

Bay of Bengal (☎ 843331; 1 Crackwell St; dishes £3-13; 🕒 dinner) Bag a window seat at the Bay of Bengal for far-reaching sea views. There is tasty sub-continental scran.

Nana's Italian Restaurant (☎ 844536; St Julian's St; mains £7-17; 🕒 lunch & dinner) By the harbour, Nana's has honest pizzas, pastas and salads, together with more sophisticated delights such as seared Welsh lamb. Alternatively, grab a drink and indulge in people-watching from the terrace.

Bay Tree (☎ 843516; Tudor Sq; mains £10-17; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Opposite Pam Pam, this place sources fresh Pembrokeshire produce and has live music on Saturdays. Try Tan-y-Draig (homemade Welsh lamb curry).

Pam Pam (☎ 842946; Tudor Sq; mains £10-19; 🕒 lunch & dinner) So good they named it twice? Not quite, but enjoy char-grilled tuna or baked butternut squash with Mediterranean vegetables in this pub-style restaurant boasting a pianist.

Plantagenet House Restaurant (☎ 842350; Quay Hill; mains £14.50-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Forget the oft-mentioned 12th-century Flemish chimney hearth, this rustic place is about creative presentation of the best local meat and seafood. The £7.95 lunchtime sausage special (try juicy lamb and mint, pork and apple, or veggie) suits all wallets.

For a rambunctious night out, follow the crowds to the most popular spots. For something less frantic, sink a real ale at the **Crown Inn** (☎ 842796; Lower Frog St).

Getting There & Away

Trains run from Swansea (£9.20, 1½ hours, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) via Carmarthen (£5.80, 40 minutes) en route to Pembroke Dock (35 minutes).

National Express coach 508 runs from Swansea (£6.80, 1½ hours, three times daily) via Carmarthen (45 minutes) and on to Haverfordwest (50 minutes, three times daily). Bus 349 also serves Haverfordwest (1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday)

MANORBIER

☎ 01834

Compact and hilly, this isolated village boasts attractions as disparate as wild sandy beaches and a batch of reject-grade waxworks from Madame Tussauds in London.

The dilapidated 12th-century **castle** (☎ 871394; www.manorbiercastle.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/1.50; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Easter-Sep) was the birthplace of Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), one of the country's greatest scholars, who was passionate about his home – 'in all the broad lands of Wales, Manorbier is the best place by far,' he wrote. This is also where the dodgy wax effigies ended up, put to good use in historical exhibits.

Perched by the hilly road down towards the sea, **Castlemead Hotel** (☎ 871358; www.castlemeadhotel.com; s/d from £40/78) is a flouncy but fine, well-established place.

Manorbier YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5954; manorbier@yha.org.uk; dm £14; 🕒 by advance booking Mar-Oct) is a lonely, modernist-looking place 200m from sandy Skrinkle Haven, 1 mile east of Manorbier.

Bus 349 serves Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly) via Pembroke (20 minutes), continuing on to Tenby (20 minutes, half-hourly).

PEMBROKE (PENFRO)

☎ 01646 / pop 7214

Wales' oldest castle and a stoic Welsh atmosphere amid medieval streets make it easy to spend a happy half-day in Pembroke. You may even wish to stay longer as the B&Bs are better value than those in popular Tenby.

The **tourist office** (☎ 622388; pembroke.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; Commons Rd; ⏲ 10am-5pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) is south of (and below) Main St.

Pembroke Dock, with ferries to Rosslare (Ireland), is a separate town 2 miles west of Pembroke. Within the Irish Ferries terminal is another **tourist office** (☎ 01646-622753; pembrokedock.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; ⏲ 10.30am-2.30pm Apr-Sep, also 10.30pm-1.30am mid–Jul-Aug) that opens in line with ferry arrival times.

Pembroke Castle

Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, there are two disparate attractions at Pembroke's **castle** (☎ 681510; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ⏲ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb). Climb 100 spiral steps for unbroken views from the keep, before dropping way down to subterranean **Wogan's Cavern**, a massive natural cave with a watergate.

During the Irish conquest, the stronghold was the base of 'Strongbow' Richard FitzGilbert, earl of Pembroke. A plaque marks the 1456 birthplace of Henry, the first Tudor king and father to Henry VIII, the monarch who formalised the English–Welsh union. During the Civil War, the fortress resisted Oliver Cromwell for 48 days until he discovered and blocked the water source.

The castle occasionally holds **open-air theatre** during summer.

Sleeping & Eating

Two central Pembroke B&Bs have enduring appeal.

Beech House (☎ 683740; 78 Main St; s/d £17.50/35) With a naturally endearing hostess, period Georgian features and rooms that are as comfy as you could wish for, Beech House immediately improves your impression of Pembroke. And with such great rates, how can you go wrong?

Woodbine (☎ 686338; 84 Main St; s/d £25/50) Next door to Beech House, Woodbine has a calm, serene atmosphere and is done out in light colours, which means you'd better leave muddy boots outside. The emphasis is on modern, which is reflected in the slightly higher rates.

Cornerstone Café (dishes £3-5; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Cross the bridge over the pond for this cute place attached to a local craft shop. Tasty organic ingredients are used in sandwiches, lasagne and the intriguing courgette-and-lemon soup.

Jays (☎ 683838; Main St; sandwiches £3) Great place for a big, floury bacon bap (£1.80).

Old Kings Arms Hotel (☎ 683611; www.oldkingsarmshotel.co.uk; Main St; mains £6-18.45; ⏲ lunch & dinner) Nothing flashy here, just good old-fashioned meat and fish dishes prepared in pub-restaurant style. The use of local produce has earned significant commendation.

COAST WITH THE MOST

Many of Pembrokeshire's best beaches lie down winding country lanes, hidden from the bigger towns and villages. Public buses are good, but if you've got your own wheels then the more remote stretches of coast are yours to explore. Just grab a map, take to the roads and check out these beauties.

- Musselwick Sands (at low tide) is near Marloes, on the spit pointing towards Skomer Island. It's a large sandy beach with plenty of craggy inlets to explore.
- Traeth Llyfn is by the village of Abereiddy near St David's. Descend a metal staircase to this pretty beach with sheltered swimming.
- Druidston Haven sits below the beguiling Druidston Hotel (p682) near Nolton Haven. Low tide reveals a long stretch of silky golden sand.
- Porthselau is south of Whitesands Bay; a tiny but cute beach great for families.
- Pwllgwaelod is near Dinas head between Fishguard and Newport. Drop down the steps to this long, wild stretch of golden shoreline.
- Broadhaven South and Barafundle Bay are near Bosherston to the south of Pembroke. There are gorgeous, secluded National Trust beaches. The walk from Barafundle to intriguing St Govan's Chapel, beautifully set into the rock, is one of the most scenic clifftop stretches in the national park.

Wisebuys Country Stores (☎ 687046; 19 Main St) Self-caterers can stock up here, with a huge array of quality meats, breads, fruit and veg.

Getting There & Away

Bus 349 calls at Pembroke (and Pembroke Dock) on its way between Haverfordwest (50 minutes) and Tenby (40 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday. On Sunday, there are five Haverfordwest services, and four Tenby services.

Irish Ferries (☎ 0870 517 1717; www.irishferries.com) runs two ferries a day to Rosslare (Ireland) from Pembroke Dock (3¾ hours).

AROUND PEMBROKE

If you need another fortress-fix, moody **Carew Castle** (☎ 651782; adult/child £3/2; ⏲ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) broods over its glassy **tidal millpond**. The 1-mile circular walk around the castle, mill, causeway and bridge is recommended.

The 12th-century fortification was later converted to an Elizabethan manor before being abandoned in 1690. The millpond used to trap the incoming tide, releasing the waters through sluice gates that turned the millwheels. For 400 years to 1937, the three-storey building ground corn for the castle estate and community. Free guided tours run daily at 2.30pm.

A tall 11th-century **Celtic cross** stands by the road near the castle entrance. Opposite, the **Carew Inn** (☎ 01646-651267; mains £7.50-16) serves quality pub food and hosts live-music nights.

The site lies 5 miles east of Pembroke. Bus 361 stops at the cross on its way between Pembroke Dock (15 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) and Tenby (55 minutes).

HAVERFORDWEST (HWLFFORDD)

☎ 01437 / pop 13,367

Less-than-attractive Haverfordwest is Pembrokeshire's main transport hub. With an inland location it lacks both the charm and breezy freedom of its coastal neighbours.

Founded in the 12th century beside the River Western Cleddau, the town allowed migrants from overpopulated Flanders to settle here. The one-time river port thrived before the railway arrived in the mid-19th century.

The small **Castle Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 763087; adult £1) is in the outer ward of the castle. The **tourist office** (☎ 763110; haverfordwest.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; 19 Old Bridge; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-May & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter) is centrally located.

Sleeping & Eating

College Guest House (☎ 763710; www.collegeguesthouse.com; 93 Hill St; s/d from £38/55) Undoubtedly the best option in town, the College mixes period style with modern hospitality and fantastic Welsh breakfasts. The en suite rooms feature wooden shutters to keep summer mornings at bay.

George's (☎ 766683; 24 Market St; mains £5-11) Sharing premises with a New Age gift-shop, George's has a unique atmosphere. Little tables hide in cosy snugs and the menu features everything from jacket potatoes to Cypriot *toufournou* (baked macaroni with minced beef or lamb), as well as tempting smoothies and shakes. When you're finished, you can probably buy the gargantuan Indonesian reclaimed-teak chairs you were just sitting on.

Getting There & Away

Bus services from Haverfordwest serve all of Pembrokeshire.

Bus 412 runs hourly to Cardigan (1¼ hours, four on Sunday) via Fishguard (45 minutes), and bus 411 serves St David's (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

National Express coach 508 serves London (£25.50, seven hours, three times daily).

Trains run every two hours to Swansea (£9.30, 1½ hours), connecting to Cardiff and London.

ST BRIDES BAY (BAE SAIN FFRAID)

Broad, beautiful St Brides Bay has Wales' best beaches, which magically absorb the summer crowds. **Little Haven** is a pretty little village above a fine beach, **Broad Haven** is the liveliest resort and glorious **Newgale** beach is the biggest strand, a honey-pot for swimmers and surfers.

The bay lies at the western end of the Landsker Line, the invisible boundary running from west to east and dividing Welsh Pembrokeshire in the north from the more anglicised south.

Activities

In Broad Haven, **Haven Sports** (☎ 01437-781354; www.havensports.co.uk) offers water-sports tuition and rents gear. For details of other teaching outfits – Outer Reef and West Wales Wind, Surf & Sailing – see p676.

Sleeping

Villages around the bay have plenty of mid-range B&Bs. Camp sites abound, and most farmers are happy to let you use a field for a couple of pounds – ask first.

Newgale Campsite (☎ 01437-710253; tent sites per person £5; 🕒 Easter-Sep) Wild site by sweeping Newgale beach, with café, pub and shop close by.

Druidston Hotel (☎ 01437-781221; www.druidstone.co.uk; d from £78-130) To call this clifftop place quirky would be an understatement. It offers a mix of beautifully remote accommodation (rooms at the top are the best), award-winning food (bar meals around £8) and individual welcome – just to start. If you've got more time to kill, ask about staying in the Roundhouse, a solar-powered self-sustaining ecohouse.

YHA hostels are well sited for beaches and the coast path:

Marloes Sands (☎ 01646-636667; reservations@yha.org.uk; dm £9.50; 🕒 Apr-Sep) For bookings more than seven days in advance call ☎ 01629-592708. It's 1 mile from Martin's Haven, and the departure point for Skomer Island.

Broad Haven (☎ 0870 770 5728; broadhaven@yha.org.uk; dm £14; 🕒 Mar-Oct with 48hr notice) Panoramic bay views.

Penycwm (☎ 0870 770 5988; penycwm@yha.org.uk; dm £15.50) Britain's first five-star hostel, 2 miles from the beach. Advance bookings only.

Getting There & Away

The coast path and Marloes, Dale, Broad Haven, Druidston and Newgale are served by the Puffin Shuttle (p678).

Regular buses run from Haverfordwest; for Dale and Marloes take bus 315 (one hour, three daily Monday to Saturday); bus 311 terminates at Broad Haven (20 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday); Newgale and Penycwm are stops on the bus 411 route, running hourly Monday to Saturday between Haverfordwest (25 minutes), St David's (20 minutes), and, infrequently, Fishguard (70 minutes).

SKOMER, SKOKHOLM & GRASSHOLM ISLANDS

Rocky and exposed, these three little islands off the St Brides Bay's southern headland are a marine nature reserve and home to some of Wales' largest **sea-bird colonies**, most active from April to mid-August. Regular trips run from Easter to October.

The largest and easiest island to reach, Skomer is home to over half a million breeding sea birds, including puffins, guillemots, razorbills, fulmars, cormorants and shags. About 150 **grey seal pups** are born here annually, and **porpoise** and **dolphin** sightings are common.

To the south, Skokholm plays host to some 35,000 **Manx shearwaters** and puffins. Together with Skomer, it has the world's largest colony of burrow-breeding Manx shearwater – 160,000 strong. Accommodation on the island can be booked through the **Wildlife Trust South & West Wales** (☎ 01239-621600).

FIVE BEST FREEBIES

Britain's not all spend, spend, spend you know. Even if the budget's running low, you can still join in these local shindigs.

- Sample the best local food direct from the producers at Haverfordwest Farmers Market, voted Britain's best in 2006. It's on alternate Fridays from 9am to 3pm at Riverside shopping centre.
- Fiddle around at a local folk club. Try the Royal Oak in Fishguard (p688), where weekly music sessions happen every Tuesday evening.
- Watch the traditional longboat races at the Solva Regatta in early August, 3 miles east of St David's.
- Discover your spiritual side at the mystical Celtic Blue Rock Community Arts Festival, with live bands, dancing, art and symbolic burning of the wicker phoenix; see www.celticbluerock.org.uk.
- Join a local group spotting sea birds or porpoises at Strumble Head near Fishguard. Ask at the tourist office for forthcoming meetings.

The smallest island is Grassholm, 11 miles offshore and with the second-largest **gannet colony** in the northern hemisphere – 33,000 pairs. Landing on Grassholm is not permitted.

Two reliable boat companies are listed as follows.

Dale Sailing (☎ Dale Princess Cruises 01646-603123, Dale Sea Safari Adventures 0800 028 4090; www.dale-sailing.co.uk; trips £8-25) has daily landing trips to Skomer, round-island cruises, evening shearwater spectaculars and high-speed rigid inflatable boat (RIB) safaris. Departures from Martin's Haven near Marloes.

Shearwater Safaris (☎ 08081 445529; www.boatrides.co.uk; trips £25) has RIB trips around the islands, including evening departures and sea-life safaris, but no landings. It's based at Neyland Yacht Haven near the Cleddau Bridge.

ST DAVID'S (TY-DDEWI)

☎ 01437 / pop 1800

Tiny St David's holds a village-like charm that, despite big summer crowds, never seems to fade. Prosperous and with a vaguely bohemian whiff, this is also Britain's smallest city, courtesy of the magnificent 12th-century cathedral that marks Wales' holiest site. It lies close to some of Pembrokeshire's wildest coast, and thrill-seekers flock here for adventure sports.

The patron saint of Wales, Dewi Sant, established the first monastic community here in the 6th century. His relics are still preserved in a casket inside the cathedral, hidden in a hollow below the main square. A visit here, and to neighbouring Bishop's Palace, is essential.

In tune with the upmarket holiday crowd that favours St D's, the tiny streets boast more than their fair share of cosmopolitan restaurants and café-bars.

Information

The combined **National Park Visitors Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 720392; enquiries@stdavids.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm) is at the east end of town, and stocks information on accommodation and national park literature. Internet access costs £1 per half-hour.

Sights

ST DAVID'S CATHEDRAL

This beautiful grey-granite **cathedral** (☎ 720691; admission by donation £3) is St David's top tourist site and should not be missed.

Built during the late 12th century on a site where a church had existed for 600 years, this is Wales' holiest site – in 1124 Pope Calixtus II declared that two pilgrimages to St David's equalled one to Rome and that three equalled a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem itself. Additions to the cathedral were subsequently made between the 12th and 16th centuries. In between times, Norse pirates plundered it on at least seven occasions.

The atmosphere inside is one of great antiquity. The floor slopes sharply and the pillars keel drunkenly following a 1248 earthquake, while the Norman nave's superb Irish oak ceiling dates from the 16th century. The equally richly carved choir in the centre of the cross is illuminated from the tower above. The relics of Dewi Sant, the patron saint, were wrecked during the Reformation and are now kept behind the altar.

As part of a large-scale renovation project the Treasury was established in 2005 to house the cathedral's treasures and tell the story of Christian worship and scholarship of St David. In 2006 the beautiful refectory opened as the Refectory at St David's restaurant.

Tours of the cathedral (£3, 1½ hours) are held at 2.30pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday during July and August.

BISHOP'S PALACE

On leaving the cathedral, don't overlook the ruins of **Bishop's Palace** (Cadw; ☎ 720517; The Close, St David's; adult/child £2.90/2.50; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). The imposing architecture, including the arcades of the parapet, is mostly due to Henry de Gower, bishop from 1327 to 1348. The palace is one of the most elaborate testaments to the power and wealth of the medieval church in this region.

The palace is a spine-tingling setting for open-air theatre during the summer Arts Festival (p685).

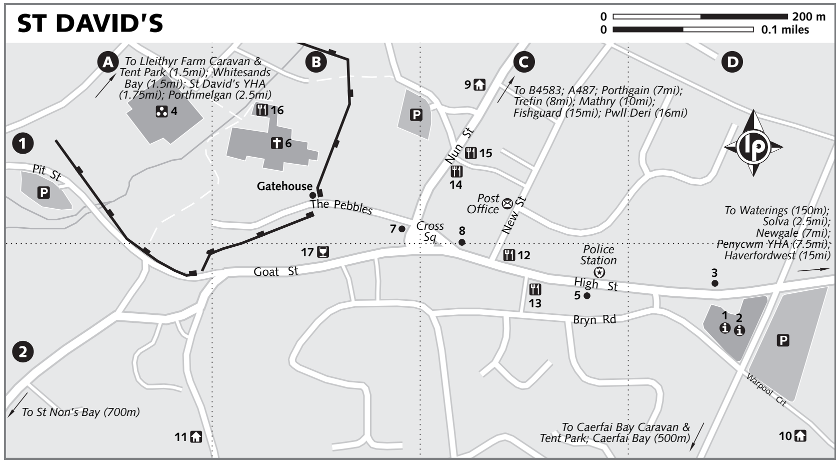
ST NON'S BAY

St David's supposed birthplace lies three-quarters of a mile south of the cathedral, beside the bay that bears his mother's name and the ruins of the 13th-century **St Non's Chapel** (also a modern chapel and a building used as a retreat). A spring at the site is attended by pilgrims and fabled for its curative powers.

BEACHES

West-facing **Whitesands Bay** (Porth Mawr), 2 miles northwest, is a prime surfing beach and

ST DAVID'S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To Lleithyr Farm Caravan & Tent Park (1.5mi); Whitesands Bay (1.5mi); St David's YHA (1.75mi); Porthmelgan (2.5mi)
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To B4583; A487; Porthgain (7mi); Trefin (8mi); Mathry (10mi); Fishguard (15mi); Pwll Deri (16mi)
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Post Office
New St
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Cross Sq
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Police Station
Goat St
High St
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To Waterings (150m); Solva (2.5mi); Newgale (7mi); Penycwm YHA (7.5mi); Haverfordwest (15mi)
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Warpool Crt
To St Non's Bay (700m)
11
To Caerfai Bay Caravan & Tent Park; Caerfai Bay (500m)
10

INFORMATION

National Park Visitors Centre	1	D2
Tourist Office	2	D2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Aquaphobia	3	D2
Bishop's Palace	4	A1
Ma Sime's Surf Hut	5	C2
St David's Cathedral	6	B1
Thousand Islands Expeditions	7	B1
TYF Adventure	8	C1
Voyages of Discovery	(see 8)	

SLEEPING 🏠

Alandale	9	C1
Twr Y Felin Hotel	10	D2
Warpool Court	11	A2

EATING 🍴

Bench	12	C2
Cwtch	13	C2
Lawton's at No 16	14	C1
Morgan's Brasserie	15	C1
Refectory at St David's	16	B1

DRINKING 🍷

Farmer's Arms	17	B2

usually crowded in summer. **Porthmelgan Beach**, a further 15 minutes' walk northwest on the coast path, is smaller and more secluded.

RAMSEY ISLAND

Just off St David's Head, Ramsey Island plays host to Atlantic grey seals and thousands of nesting sea birds, whilst porpoises and dolphins frolic near spectacular sea caves.

Boat trips covering island landings, cave tours, jet-boating and whale and dolphin-watching are offered by several companies in St David's – make sure whichever one you choose follows the Pembrokeshire Marine Code, designed to protect the fragile park environment.

Aquaphobia (☎ 720471, after hours 721648; www.aquaphobia-ramseyisland.co.uk; Grove Hotel, High St; trips £20-40) offers round-Ramsey tours and evening trips to see shearwaters.

Thousand Islands Expeditions (☎ 721721/721686; www.thousandislands.co.uk; Cross Sq; trips £14-50) has evening puffin- and shearwater-spotting, whale watching, fishing trips and high-speed rigid inflatable boat (RIB) jaunts, as well as Ramsey cruises with landing and guided walks.

On **Voyages of Discovery** (☎ 0800 854367; www.ramseyisland.co.uk; 1 High St; trips £15-50) you'll enjoy whale watching, Ramsey voyages, north-coast adventures to Strumble Head, and puffin and shearwater cruises.

Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

The Pembrokeshire Coast Path passes St David's. The nearest sections are a mile south around Porthclais, St Non's Bay or Caerfai Bay (all about a mile apart). The path around the peninsula between Solva, St Justinian and Whitesands Bay is a longer trek, served by two youth hostels – St David's YHA Hostel and Penycwm (p682). The tourist office stocks walking leaflets.

St David's is the westernmost point of the Celtic Trail cycle route (see p676).

WATER SPORTS

Whitesands Surf School (☎ 07789-435670; www.whitesandssurfschool.co.uk; 2½hr lesson £25) teaches at the popular surf spot of Whitesands Bay and has a base inside Ma Sime's Surf Hut in St David's.

TYF Adventure (☎ 01437-721611; www.tyf.com; Twr y Felin; 1 High St; half/full-day/full-board weekend £45/85/190) offers coasteering, sea-kayaking, climbing and surfing trips.

Festivals & Events

St David's Cathedral Festival (☎ 720271; festival@stdavidscathedral.org.uk) Nine days of classical recitals in the cathedral from late May to early July.

Arts Festival The highlights of this two-week gathering, beginning in early August, are the atmospheric open-air Shakespeare productions at romantic Bishop's Palace.

Really Wild Food Festival (☎ 891381; www.reallywildfestival.co.uk) Celebrate the best local food and crafts at this jamboree held over a weekend in early September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Lleithyr Farm Caravan & Tent Park (☎ 720245; www.whitesands-stdavids.co.uk; 2-person tent site £6.50; ⏰ Easter-Oct) Near Whitesands beach and on the coastal path, this five-star site has a shop selling fresh meat – ideal for the barbeque.

St David's YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6042; stdavids@yha.org; Llaethdy; dm £11; ⏰ Easter-Oct with advance bookings) Also near Whitesands, this is a basic, self-catering farmhouse hostel. It's a 1.75 mile walk from town – there's no public transport.

Caerfai Bay Caravan & Tent Park (☎ 720274; www.caerfaibay.co.uk; 2-person tent site £12.75-16.25; ⏰ Mar–mid-Nov) The last stop before hitting the little beach. The views are one reason this site gets busy; book ahead in summer.

MIDRANGE

Twr Y Felin Hotel (☎ 721678; www.tyf.com/tyfhotel; s/d £40/80, without bathroom £30/60) Part of the TYF Adventure group, this laid-back hotel offers a place to stay that's clean, crisp and unfussy. Retaining original features from the period property, like marble fireplaces, the restaurant also doubles as a summer barbeque.

Alandale (☎ 720404; www.stdavids.co.uk/guesthouse/alandale.htm; 43 Nun St; s/d £32.5/65; 🚭) Still offering great value in the 'city', Alandale is a smart town house with sweeping rear views over the peninsula. Rooms are with en suite, and the lounge boasts an open fire to banish those winter chills.

Waterings (☎ 720876; www.waterings.co.uk; Anchor Dr, High St; d from £70; 🚭) Close to the tourist office, this sprawling bungalow has large gardens and accommodation set around an internal courtyard. En suite rooms are large and comfortably furnished.

TOP END

Warpool Court (☎ 720387; www.warpoolcourthotel.com; d from £180; 💻 🏊) Rooms at this stately old hotel are a little dated (especially for the price) but you're paying for unrivalled sea views and the classic stately home experience – croquet, tennis and, should you wish, an afternoon G&T on the lawn.

Eating & Drinking

Bench (☎ 721778; 11 High St; mains £1.50-13; ⏰ 10am-10pm; 💻 wi-fi) Bustling, rabbit-warren bar with a stylish Mediterranean feel. Snuggle into deep sofas or try the bright, sunflower-themed conservatory – a great place to chomp on fresh pizza or just sip a coffee. Don't miss the wonderful ice creams (blackberry and apple pie, for example) made with local milk. Internet access costs £1 per 20 minutes or £3.75 wireless docking charge.

Refectory at St David's (☎ 721760; mains £1.65-8.45; ⏰ 10am-6pm, until 9pm Jul & Aug) St D's most atmospheric dining experience opened in mid-2006 as the centrepiece of the cathedral's renovation project. Medieval St Mary's Hall has been given a splendid ultramodern face-lift, with blonde woods contrasting against the exposed walls and a shiny mezzanine supported on slanted legs. The food – honest and great value – just tops it off.

Cwtch (☎ 720422; 22 High St; 1-/2-/3-courses £14/20/25; ⏰ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) Another city-sleek place causing ripples, Cwtch means 'warm, safe place' and you'll feel embraced by the affable welcome and contemporary, locally sourced food. Delights include superb fish pie and asparagus and goats cheese tart. The upstairs bar boasts long drinks and cool sounds.

Morgan's Brasserie (☎ 720508; 20 Nun St; mains £12.50-19.50; ⏰ dinner Wed-Mon) Another well-established bistro, chocolate-and-beige Morgan's serves a similar array of lip-smacking fish and meat dishes.

Lawton's at No 16 (☎ 729220; 16 Nun St; mains £16-32; ⏰ dinner Tue-Sun) A stylish, bright interior contains fishy delights at Lawton's, which also gets the juices flowing with prime free-range meats. It's not the cheapest, but local recommendations are glowing.

Farmer's Arms (☎ 721666; Goat St) Busy and relaxed, this is a real pub.

Getting There & Around

Bus 411 stops en route from Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) to Fishguard (50 minutes, every two hours, one on Sunday).

St David's is served by the Puffin Shuttle, Celtic Coaster and Strumble Shuttle (p678), which stop at coast path access points and villages.

St David's gets clogged with summer traffic so park the car at the tourist office and walk the five minutes to town, or hop on the free shuttle bus.

AROUND ST DAVID'S

If you plan to spend any time mooching the less explored cliffs and coves, make it the rugged stretch from St David's to Fishguard. This is one of Pembrokeshire's most beautiful areas.

The Strumble Shuttle bus (p678) serves various points along the coast path between St David's and Fishguard.

Close to St David's is the cove village of **Porthgain**, with sheltered harbour and a fantastic fish restaurant. The ramshackle **Shed** (☎ 01348-831518; lunch dishes £6-18, dinner dishes £19.50-23; ⏰ tearoom 9am-5pm, 7-11.30pm, closed Mon Apr-Sep, bistro 7.30-11pm Fri & Sat Oct-Mar) is pricey but serves some of the best fish and seafood you'll ever taste. Booking is essential. Just across the green, the 250-year-old **Sloop Inn** (☎ 01437-831449) will serve you a decent pint if you don't want to eat at the Shed.

On this stretch of coast are some wonderful places to stay.

Experience space by the coast in the luxury B&B **Awel Mor** (☎ 01348-837865; www.stdavids.co.uk/guesthouse/awelmor.htm; Penparc; s/d from £30/60; ☒). With its large gardens, terraced patio and open views to the sea, you might spend more time outside than in your comfy room.

In Llanrhian, 5 miles east of St David's, is **Caerhafod Lodge** (☎ 01348-837859; www.caerhafod.co.uk; dm £13), a spic-and-span private hostel with en suite dorms (with power showers); huge self-catering kitchen and priceless friendly welcome.

Preseli Venture Adventure Lodge (☎ 01348-837709; www.preseliventure.com; half/full-day/full-board weekend from £45/89/189) is the newly created dorm accommodation at this activity centre with the friendly welcome and wonderfully isolated location. You can have full run of the lodge (including pool table, wood-burning stove, library and seemingly endless coffee), and it's a 10-minute woodland stroll down to Abermawr beach, where you can sometimes watch sleepy seals.

Pwll Deri (☎ 0870 770 6004; Trefaser; dm £11) is the only YHA hostel remaining on this coastal stretch. It's a basic whitewashed house perched high on the cliffs, with cinematic sea views and the chance to spot seals. It's open from Easter to October with advance booking. Find it at Trefaser, 4.5 miles west of Fishguard.

FISHGUARD (ABERGWAUN)

☎ 01348 / pop 3193

Fishguard might be famous for being a ferry terminal with a funny name, but don't be put off by preconceptions. Stop awhile and you'll discover a hilly little town with a cute harbour and intriguing history. Lying towards the northeastern end of the coast path, it's also temptingly close to the rocky promontories of Strumble Head and Dinas Head, and the green inland Gwaun Valley and Preseli Hills.

From the town centre the main street plummets eastward to the picturesque original harbour of Lower Fishguard, the setting for the 1971 film *Under Milk Wood* starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

Ferries to Ireland actually sail from the neighbouring town of Goodwick (Fishguard Harbour) in the next bay northwest.

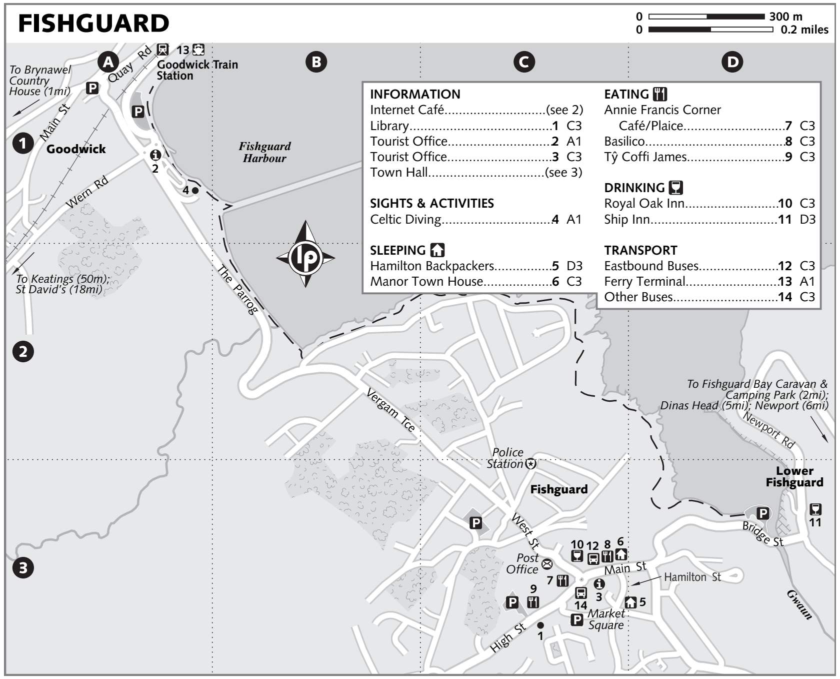
In February 1797 Fishguard was the improbable setting for the last invasion of Britain. Some 1400 French mercenaries landed with the intention of marching to Liverpool and diverting English troops, thereby allowing another French force to conquer Ireland. But the ragamuffin band stumbled across stocks of Portuguese wine and, befuddled by its potency, were captured by sober locals. Their surrender was signed in the town's Royal Oak Inn, which still pulls a decent pint.

In 1997 a magnificent 30m tapestry telling the story of the invasion was commissioned to mark the bicentenary of this event. It was planned for this to be on permanent display in the town hall from early 2007.

Orientation & Information

The train station (Fishguard Harbour) and ferry port (for ferries to Rosslare, Ireland) are at Goodwick, about a 20-minute walk northwest from central Fishguard.

The town **tourist office** (☎ 873484; fishguard.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; ⏰ 10am-5pm Easter-May & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter) is at the town hall by the central roundabout. At the time of research it had been temporarily moved to the library while renovation work was carried out on the town hall, although this should now be complete.



INFORMATION		
Internet Café	(see 2)	
Library	1	C3
Tourist Office	2	A1
Tourist Office	3	C3
Town Hall	(see 3)	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Celtic Diving	4	A1
SLEEPING		
Hamilton Backpackers	5	D3
Manor Town House	6	C3

EATING		
Annie Francis Corner Café/Plaice	7	C3
Basilico	8	C3
Tŷ Coffi James	9	C3
DRINKING		
Royal Oak Inn	10	C3
Ship Inn	11	D3
TRANSPORT		
Eastbound Buses	12	C3
Ferry Terminal	13	A1
Other Buses	14	C3

The **portside tourist office** (☎ 872037; ⏰ 10am-6pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter; internet per 30min £2), with internet café, is near the ferry terminal at Goodwick.

Activities

WALKING & DIVING

Tourist offices stock walking literature for knobbly Dinas Head and the Preseli Hills, as well as the coast path section around Strumble Head.

Use the Celtic Coaster, Strumble Shuttle and Poppit Rocket bus services (p678) for travel to points west and east on the coast path, to walk sections or all the way back.

Located near the ferry terminal, **Celtic Diving** (☎ 871938; www.celticdiving.co.uk; Goodwick Parrog) will take you from a try-out session through to full PADI certification. It also has clean, comfortable dorm accommodation (£18) in the purpose-built accommodation block.

Sleeping

Pwll Deri (opposite) is the nearest YHA hostel.

Fishguard Bay Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 811415; www.fishguardbay.com; 2-person tent site from £10; ⏰ Mar-Nov) On a peninsula overlooking the bay, this well-equipped site has TV room, laundry and pool table. It's 2 miles east of Fishguard and handy for the coast path.

Hamilton Backpackers (☎ 874797; www.hamiltonbackpackers.co.uk; 21 Hamilton St; dm/d £14/36; ☒) Swing your thing in a garden hammock, hit the sauna or watch satellite TV. Yep, this *is* a hostel – it's also central and close to the town's boozers.

Keatings (☎ 873546; Manor Way; s/d £35/45) Just 500m from the ferry terminal, this makes a good base if you need to be near the boats. Rooms are simple yet comfortable.

Manor Town House (☎ /fax 873260; Main St; s/d from £35/65) Still Fishguard's classiest option. The graceful décor of this Georgian town house is a cut above average and has attracted national press acclaim. There's a beautiful palm-tree garden and an excellent three-course dinner for £19.50.

Eating & Drinking

Tŷ Coffi James (High St; snacks & cakes £1.50-5) Improbably located in a sewing shop, this modern café has homemade sandwiches, cakes and breakfasts. There's a garden at the rear and local artworks adorn the walls.

Annie Francis Corner Café/Plaice (☎ 874649; Market Sq; mains around £11; 🕒 dinner Tue-Sat Jul-Oct) On a cold, wet morning, this is a fantastic place for a greasy bacon bap. On a warm, sunny evening it's well worth investigating the fresh fish dishes. A winner, whatever the weather.

Royal Oak Inn (☎ 872514; Market Sq) Full of invasion memorabilia, the Oak is well known for its winning weekly folk jig.

Ship Inn (☎ 874033; Newport Rd) By the old harbour in the pretty lower town, here be the snuggest little tavern you ever could wish to find.

At the time of research a new Italian restaurant offering accommodation, called Basilico, was preparing to open. Why not check it out and let us know what it's like?

Getting There & Away

Bus 411 serves St David's (50 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday). Bus 412 stops en route to Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and Cardigan (40 minutes).

The Strumble Shuttle (west to St David's) and Poppit Rocket (east to Cardigan), serve points and villages along the coast (p678).

Fishguard Harbour railway station (Goodwick) has services from London Paddington (£67, 4½ to 5½ hours, two daily) – change at Cardiff – and Swansea (£9.30, 1½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday).

Stena Line (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.co.uk) runs a boat (3½ hours, two daily) as well as a faster summertime catamaran (two hours, two to four daily) to Rosslare, Ireland.

Getting Around

Bus 410 swings between Fishguard and Goodwick (five minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday).

NEWPORT (TREFDRAETH)

☎ 01239 / pop 1120

Towards the northeast boundary of the national park, diminutive Newport lies snuggled at the mouth of the River Nevern in attractive Newport Bay.

Dominated by the rocky outcrop of **Carn Ingli** (347m), Newport makes a great base for discovering the mystical Preseli Hills, just a few miles inland. There are also several beaches, of which **Parrog Beach** and **Newport Sands** are the most popular.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820912; info@newporttouristoffice.fsnet.co.uk; 2 Bank Cottages, Long St; 🕒 9.45am-1pm & 1.45-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.45am-1.15pm Sun) is opposite the car park. The village is also home to the **Newport Collective** (☎ 821056; Market St), a group of artists who collaborate to promote and sell local crafts.

Be sure not to confuse the village with the city of the same name, near Cardiff.

Walking & Cycling

The tourist office can suggest local walks; try the town trail, a section of coast path, a hike up Carn Ingli or the picturesque Gwaun Valley (Cwm Gwaun) leading to the Preseli Hills (high point Cwmcerwyn, 535m).

Cycling is also good. Try the Gwaun Valley again and, for mountain biking, the hilly Preseli bridleways. Hire bikes and get local route information from **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 820773/820330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15), based at Newport Wholefoods on the main street.

Sleeping & Eating

Morawelon Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 820565; Parrog Beach; 2-person tent sites £10-11.50) Camp near the coast, northwest of the centre (leave the A487 near the Royal Oak Inn in Fishguard).

Trefdraeth YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6072; reservations@yha.org.uk; Lower St Mary St; dm £12.50; 🕒 Easter-Oct with advance bookings) A converted schoolhouse centrally located by the tourist office; self-catering only and with no daytime access.

our pick **Llys Meddyg Guesthouse & Restaurant** (☎ 820008; www.llysmeddyg.com; East St; d £90-120; mains £6.50-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner; ☒) This converted doctor's residence takes contemporary big-city cool and plonks it firmly by the seaside. Chic rooms boast comfy beds, gorgeous en suites and luxurious touches including LCD TVs and exposed oak. The bar and restaurant epitomise the design ethos: funky urban-type retreat downstairs (think chill-out) and a classically opulent dining room upstairs, serving the best in innovative dishes. Outside, the garden kitchen serves high-quality pub-style dishes in a less formal atmosphere.

Cnapan (☎ 820575; www.cnapan.co.uk; East St; s/d £45/76; closed mid-Jan–mid-Mar; ☒) Close by is this more classically British B&B. Rooms here are spacious and decorated with period furnishings and homely clutter, while the commended restaurant (two-/three-course dinner £22/27.50) offers winning dishes.

THRILLS AND HILLS

Craggy coast and shimmering sands dominate Pembrokeshire, but turn away from the sea and follow the national park inland to the ancient **Preseli Hills** near Fishguard and a whole new landscape reveals itself. It's littered with prehistoric forts, standing stones and burial chambers, and ancient trade routes crossed these spiritual hills. From here, around 1500 BC, came the bluestone megaliths of Stonehenge in England, almost 250 miles away.

This is excellent mountain-biking territory, where quiet country lanes and the shady Pantmaenog Forest lead to the hills' highest peak, Cwmcerwyn (5365m). From the summit, the views across the coastline and beyond to the Irish Sea are breathtaking.

To plan your own routes use Ordnance Survey Landranger 1:50,000 map 145. For bike rentals and route information, contact **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 01239-820773/330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15).

Café Fleur (☎ 820131; Market St; dishes £5.25-10; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-9pm Jul-Sep) Cosy, wood-rich café with no-nonsense grub like sausage and mash and steak-and-onion pie. In the daytime, grab a panini or deliciously decadent Belgian waffle.

Getting There & Away

Bus 412 runs through Newport between Fishguard (15 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and Cardigan (20 minutes).

AROUND NEWPORT

Nevern

The overgrown castle and **Church of St Brynach** make this hamlet, 2 miles east of Newport, a curious excursion. St Brynach was a 5th-century Irish holy man who lived in a hut on Carn Ingli, above Newport.

The atmospheric 6th-century churchyard contains a **Celtic cross** erected some 500 years later, and has a shady alley of ancient yew trees leading to the church door. Inside, the **Maglocunus Stone** is though to be 5th-century and bears inscriptions in Latin and *ogham* (an ancient Celtic script).

Castell Henllys

A visit to this **castle** (☎ 891319; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) is an intriguing affair. Ongoing archaeological digs have enabled a faithful reconstruction of an important Iron Age settlement *in situ*, with authentic roundhouses and outbuildings sitting on original foundations. Craft demonstrations and costumed staff enliven the site.

The site was the location for the BBC's *Surviving the Iron Age* TV series, which plucked a group of jolly volunteers from the comfort of modern life and dropped them into scratchy woollen clothes (no underpants) to survive with little more than axes, hammers, candles, chickens (live), eel traps and an outside latrine. Tempers flared.

It's 4 miles east of Newport along the A487. Bus 412 Fishguard–Newport–Cardigan stops at Melina Rd, three-quarters of a mile south.

Pentre Ifan

A little imagination helps validate the long uphill hike to 5500-year-old Pentre Ifan, one of Wales' best-preserved Neolithic cromlechs (burial chambers). A huddle of stones is actually a delicate arrangement with a great capstone balanced on the pinpoint of upright slabs – the skeleton of what was once a huge enclosed earthen mound. The soil has been eroded by the passage of time.

Pentre Ifan is 2 miles south of Nevern. Take bus 412 from Newport (ask the driver for the Pentre Ifan stop), then walk 2.5 miles up signposted lanes.

CARDIGAN (ABERTEIFI)

☎ 01239 / pop 4082

Although Cardigan lies in the county of Ceredigion, it appears in this Pembrokeshire Coast National Park section as it's the closest town to the northern end of the coast path. The big walk begins at Poppit Sands to the northwest. The town itself, near the mouth of the River Teifi, is small, busy and worth a fleeting visit.

The **tourist office** (☎ 613230; cardigantouristoffice@ceredigion.gov.uk; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) shares the lobby of Theatr Mwldan.

Sights

A contrasting vision of ragged stone, rampant ivy and plastic tarpaulin, the town's medieval **Cardigan Castle** is emerging from decades of neglect. It was for many years under private ownership, but the local council purchased the ramshackle ruins in 2003 and national fame followed when the castle featured on BBC TV's *Restoration*. Today renovation is well underway, allowing a unique chance to see the site in a state of flux. The scale of the task is astonishing – trees and creepers have ravaged the buildings but you can pick up an explanatory leaflet and follow a rudimentary path through the grounds, often alone amid eerie silence.

In more glorious times, some 800 years ago, the castle hosted the first competitive eisteddfod, held by Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd in 1176 to select his court musicians. Those times might be returning (crowds, café, visitor centre and all), so take a look now before it's completed. Find the site down tiny Green St opposite the Castle Café.

Cardigan's **Heritage Centre** (☎ 614404; 🕑 10am-5pm Sun-Fri), in a restored but scruffy granary by the town bridge, tells the town history.

Theatr Mwldan (☎ 621200), which shares a space with the tourist office, is an excellent modern town theatre and cinema, with gallery and café.

Sleeping & Eating

Brongwyn Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 613644; 2-person tent sites £10) Camp 3 miles northeast off the A487 at Penparc.

Poppit Sands YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5996; poppit@yha.org.uk; dm £14) This is tucked away by Cardigan Bay, four miles northwest of town and near the start/finish of the coast path. The Poppit Rocket (p678) sets down in the car park half a mile away.

Tipi West (☎ 07813-672336; www.tipiwest.co.uk; Hendre Farm, Blaenannerch; tipi £15) Fancy a Welsh camping experience with a difference? Snuggle by the fire in an authentic tipi (tepee) a stone's throw from the golden sands of Aberporth – just bring a sleeping bag. Find it 5 miles east of Cardigan off the A487.

Brynhyfryd Guest House (☎ 612861; Gwbert Rd; s/d from £21/45; 🚭) There's not much choice in town, but here's a well-established, friendly place with six spacious rooms (three with en suite).

Abdul's Tandoori Spice (☎ 621416; 2 Royal Oak; dishes £2.50-15; 🕑 5-11.45pm) Renowned for lip-smacking curry dishes, Abdul's is opposite the Somerfield supermarket.

Food For Thought Café (☎ 621863; 13 High St; mains £5-11) Lovely pastel-shaded café specialising in organic and veggie meals, and boasting plenty of daily specials.

Getting There & Away

Bus 412 serves Haverfordwest (1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Fishguard (50 minutes); buses 460 and 461 serve Carmarthen (1½ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday). Heading east, more remote points on the north coast are served by the Poppit Rocket (p678).

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Southwest England

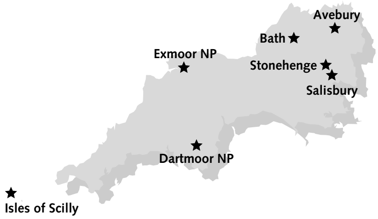
From the broad sandy beaches of Devon and Cornwall and the vibrant cities of Bristol and Bath to the endearingly old-fashioned seaside resorts of Torquay, Lyme Regis and Weymouth, the southwest is one of Britain's richest and most rewarding areas. Few regions in Britain can boast such a fantastically diverse mix of landscapes, communities and characters – this is a patchwork land of rural fields and rugged cliffs, sleepy hamlets and medieval market towns, Roman settlements and picturesque fishing harbours.

First settled by prehistoric people and later inhabited by successive waves of Celtic, Saxon, Roman and Norman invaders, this corner of Britain was once divided into several self-governing kingdoms, and that sense of separateness endures to this day. The differences between the region's five counties – Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall – may not be immediately obvious to the first-time visitor, but spend a little time here and you'll soon realise just how different these next-door neighbours are beneath the surface.

The rural counties of Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset once made up the old kingdom of Wessex, which officially disappeared in the 8th century but was memorably revived in the novels of Thomas Hardy. This is an area best known for its ancient heritage, home to the mysterious stone circles of Avebury and Stonehenge, as well as an astonishing array of barrows, burial mounds and hilltop forts and the cathedral cities of Wells and Salisbury. To the west of Wessex is Devon, famous for its cream teas and coastal scenery, and still one of Britain's favourite home-grown holiday spots. Further west the Celtic stronghold of Cornwall, long a favourite haunt for smugglers, surfers and second-home-owners alike, is enjoying something of a renaissance as a centre

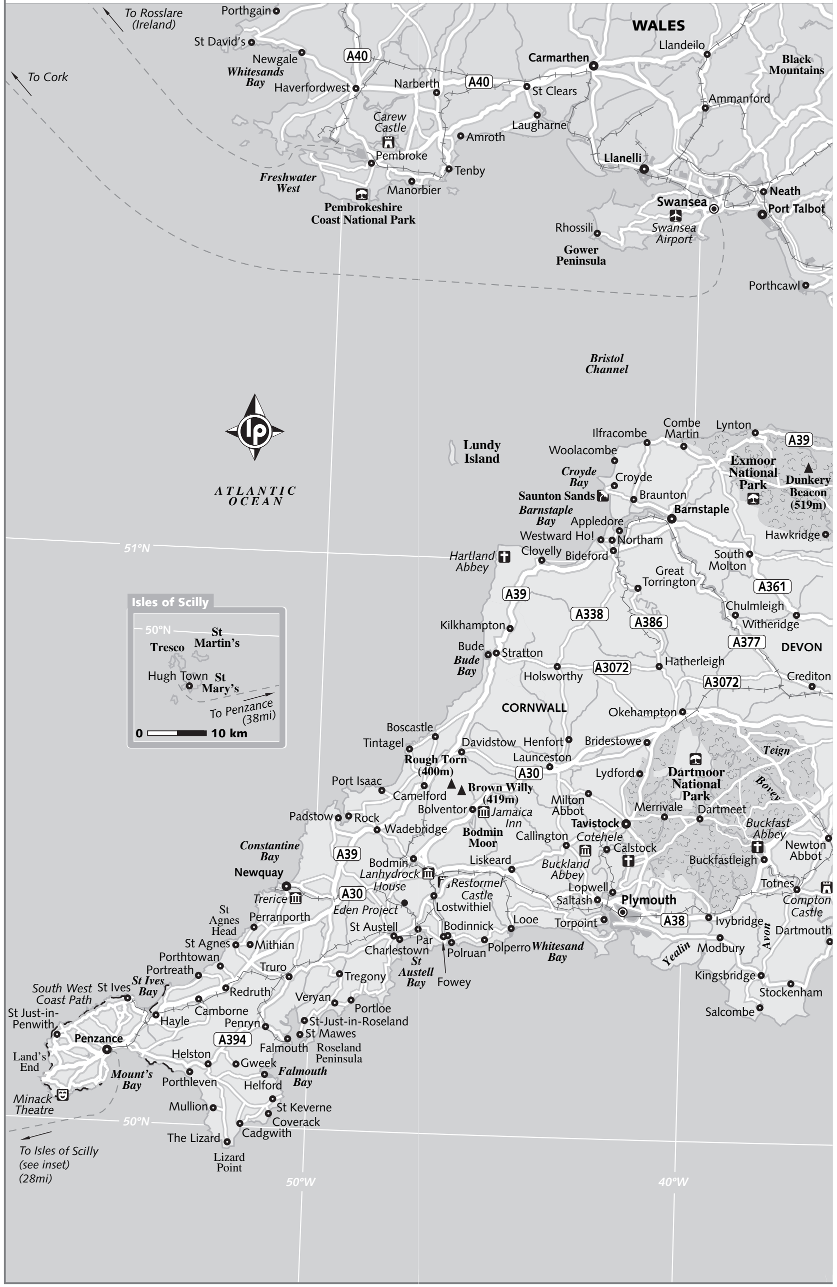
HIGHLIGHTS

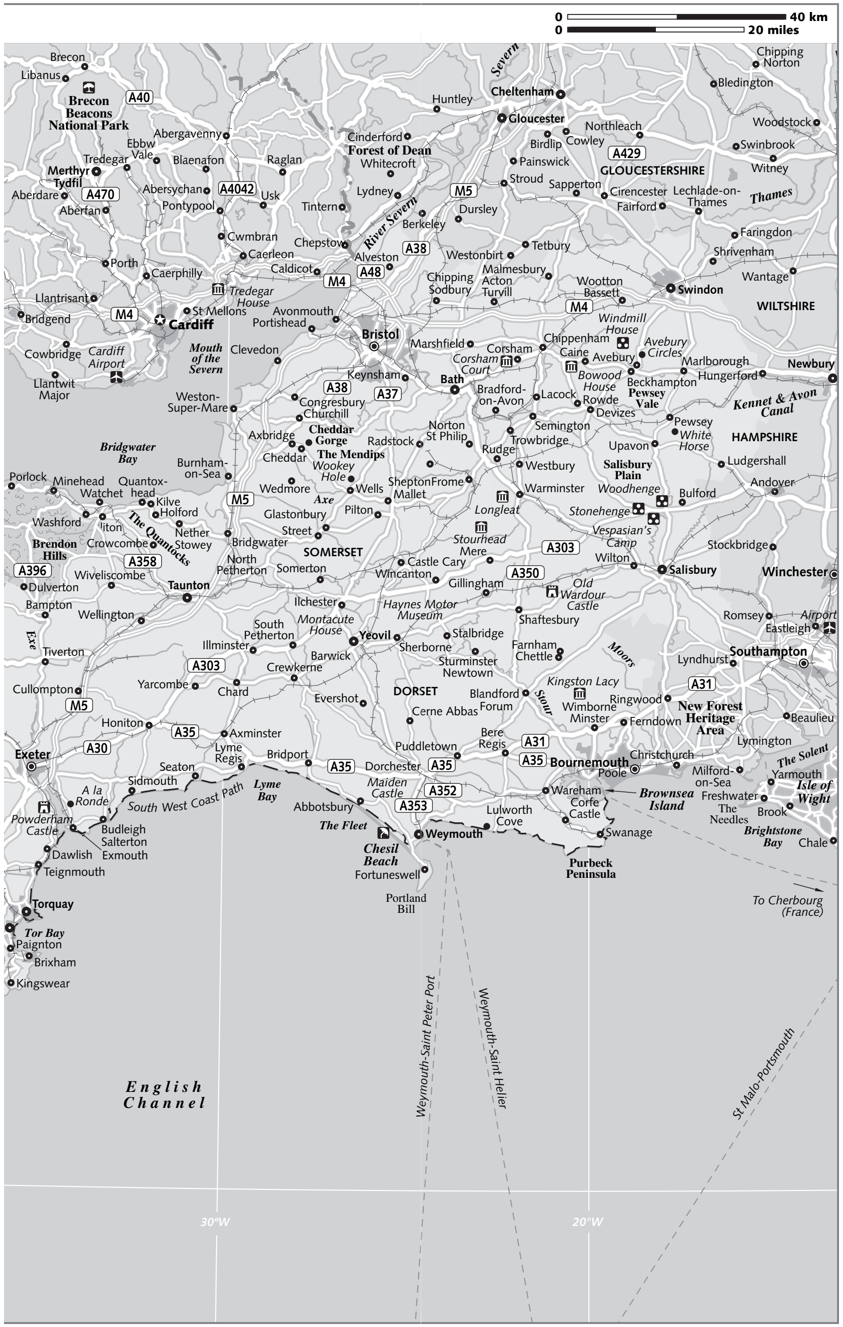
- Drinking in the view from the spire of **Salisbury Cathedral** (p286)
- Playing the dandy on the streets of Georgian **Bath** (p256)
- Taking to the trails and tors of **Dartmoor** (p309) and **Exmoor** (p269)
- Exploring the ancient history of **Avebury** (p293) and **Stonehenge** (p289)
- Wandering the clifftops along the **South West Coast Path** (p244)
- Escaping the outside world on the remote **Isles of Scilly** (p337)



- POPULATION: 2.5 MILLION
- AREA: 7649 SQ MILES

SOUTHWEST ENGLAND


To Rosslare (Ireland)
Porthgain
St David's
Newgale
Whitesands Bay
Haverfordwest
To Cork
A40
Narberth
A40
Carmarthen
WALES
Llandeilo
Black Mountains
St Clears
Ammanford
Carew Castle
Amroth
Laugharne
Pembroke
Tenby
Llanelli
Freshwater West
Manorbier
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Neath
Swansea
Port Talbot
Swansea Airport
Rhossili
Gower Peninsula
Porthcawl
Bristol Channel
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Lundy Island
Ilfracombe
Combe Martin
Lynton
A39
Woolacombe
Exmoor National Park
Dunkery Beacon (519m)
Croyde Bay
Croyde
Saunton Sands
Braunton
Barnstaple Bay
Barnstaple
Appledore
Westward Ho!
Northam
Hawkridge
51°N
Hartland Abbey
Clovelly
Bideford
South Molton
Great Torrington
A361
A39
A338
A386
Chulmleigh
Witheridge
Isles of Scilly
50°N
St Martin's
Tresco
Hugh Town
St Mary's
To Penzance (38mi)
0
10 km
Kilkhampton
Bude
Stratton
Bude Bay
A377
DEVON
Holsworthy
A3072
Hatherleigh
A3072
Crediton
CORNWALL
Okehampton
Boscastle
Tintagel
Davidstow
Henfort
Bridestowe
Teign
Rough Torn (400m)
Launceston
A30
Lydford
Dartmoor National Park
Port Isaac
Camelford
Brown Willy (419m)
Bovey
Padstow
Rock
Bolventor
Jamaica Inn
Milton Abbot
Merrivale
Dartmeet
Wadebridge
Bodmin Moor
Tavistock
Buckfast Abbey
Constantine Bay
A39
Callington
Cotehele
Calstock
Newton Abbot
Newquay
Bodmin
Lanhydrock House
Liskeard
Buckland Abbey
Buckfastleigh
Trerice
A30
Restormel Castle
Lopwell
Totnes
Eden Project
Lostwithiel
Saltash
Plymouth
Compton Castle
St Agnes Head
Perranporth
St Austell
Bodinnick
Looe
Torpoint
A38
Ivybridge
Dartmouth
St Agnes
Mithian
Charlestown
Par
Polruan
Polperro
Whitesand Bay
Yealin
Modbury
Avon
Porthtowan
St Austell Bay
Portreath
Truro
Tregony
Fowey
Kingsbridge
South West Coast Path
St Ives
St Ives Bay
Redruth
Stockenham
Veryan
Portloe
Camborne
St Just-in-Penwith
Hayle
Penryn
St-Just-in-Roseland
St Mawes
Salcombe
Penzance
A394
Falmouth
Roseland Peninsula
Helston
Land's End
Gweek
Mount's Bay
Porthleven
Helford
Falmouth Bay
Minack Theatre
Mullion
St Keverne
Coverack
50°N
Cadgwith
The Lizard
To Isles of Scilly (see inset) (28mi)
Lizard Point
50°W
40°W


0
40 km
0
20 miles
Brecon
Libanus
Severn
Chipping Norton
Cheltenham
Huntley
Bledington
Brecon Beacons National Park
A40
Gloucester
Woodstock
Northleach
Cinderford
Forest of Dean
Abergavenny
Ebbw Vale
Birdlip
Cowley
Swinbrook
Whitecroft
A429
Tredegar
Blaenafon
Raglan
Painswick
Witney
Merthyr Tydfil
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Abersychan
A4042
Lydney
Stroud
Sapperton
Aberdare
A470
Usk
M5
Cirencester
Lechlade-on-Thames
Thames
Pontypool
Tintern
Dursley
Fairford
Aberfan
River Severn
Berkeley
Faringdon
Cwmbran
Chepstow
Tetbury
Caerleon
Alveston
A38
Westonbirt
Shrivenham
Porth
Caldicot
A48
Malmesbury
Wantage
Caerphilly
M4
Chipping Sodbury
Acton Turvill
Wootton Bassett
Swindon
Tredegar House
Llantrisant
St Mellons
Avonmouth
M4
WILTSHIRE
M4
Portishead
Windmill House
Bridgend
Cardiff
Bristol
Avebury Circles
Marshfield
Corsham
Chippenham
Mouth of the Severn
Clevedon
Corsham Court
Caine
Avebury
Marlborough
Newbury
Cowbridge
Cardiff Airport
Bowood House
Hungerford
Keynsham
Bath
Beckhampton
Llantwit Major
A38
A37
Bradford-on-Avon
Lacock
Rowde
Pewsey Vale
Kennet & Avon Canal
Weston-Super-Mare
Congresbury
Devizes
Churchill
Semington
Pewsey
Cheddar Gorge
Norton St Philip
HAMPSHIRE
Bridgwater Bay
Axbridge
Radstock
Trowbridge
White Horse
Cheddar
The Mendips
Rudge
Upavon
Ludgershall
Burnham-on-Sea
Wookey Hole
Westbury
Salisbury Plain
Porlock
Minehead
Quantox-head
Wedmore
Wells
Shepton Mallet
Frome
Andover
Watchet
Axe
Warminster
Woodhenge
Bulford
M5
Kilve
Glastonbury
Pilton
Longleat
Washford
Holford
Stonehenge
Nether Stowey
Street
Williton
Vespasian's Camp
Brendon Hills
Crowcombe
The Quantocks
Bridgwater
Stourhead Mere
Stockbridge
SOMERSET
A303
A358
North Petherton
Castle Cary
Wilton
A396
Wiveliscombe
Somerton
Wincanton
A350
Salisbury
Winchester
Dulverton
Taunton
Gillingham
Old Wardour Castle
Bampton
Ilchester
Haynes Motor Museum
Wellington
Romsey
Airport
Exe
Montacute House
Shaftesbury
Eastleigh
South Petherton
Yeovil
Stalbridge
Tiverton
Ilminster
Sherborne
Moors
Southampton
Barwick
Farnham
Chettle
Lyndhurst
A303
Crewkerne
Sturminster Newton
Cullompton
Yarcombe
Chard
DORSET
Kingston Lacy
A31
Evershot
Blandford Forum
Stour
Ringwood
New Forest Heritage Area
M5
Cerne Abbas
Wimborne Minster
Ferndown
Beaulieu
Honiton
A35
Axminster
Bere Regis
Exeter
A30
Lyme Regis
Puddletown
A31
Lymington
Seaton
Bridport
A35
Dorchester
A35
A35
Bournemouth
Christchurch
The Solent
Sidmouth
Lyme Bay
Maiden Castle
Poole
Milford-on-Sea
Yarmouth
A la Ronde
A352
Isle of Wight
South West Coast Path
Abbotsbury
A353
Wareham
Brownsea Island
Freshwater
Powderham Castle
Corfe Castle
The Needles
Brook
Budleigh Salterton
The Fleet
Lulworth Cove
Brightstone Bay
Chale
Weymouth
Swanage
Dawlish
Exmouth
Chesil Beach
Teignmouth
Purbeck Peninsula
Fortuneswell
To Cherbourg (France)
Torquay
Portland Bill
Tor Bay
Paignton
Brixham
Kingswear
Weymouth-Saint Peter Port
Weymouth-Saint Helier
St Malo-Portsmouth
English Channel
30°W
20°W

Orientation & Information

The Southwest Peninsula stretches west from the flat plains and chalky downs of Wiltshire and Dorset all the way to Land's End, mainland Britain's most westerly point. Rugged coastline surrounds the region on three sides, while a spine of hard granite runs through its centre and the high heaths of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

The various railway lines to the southwest converge on Bristol and Exeter before cutting south towards the coast, skirting the edge of Dartmoor and continuing west all the way to Truro and Penzance. The main road through the region is the M5, which runs into the A30 just west of Exeter and continues on into Cornwall. Another main route is the A303, which cuts across Salisbury Plain past Stonehenge on its way towards Exeter and Plymouth, before joining the A38 into Cornwall.

The **South West Tourist Board** (www.visitsouthwest.com) covers a huge area from Gloucester and Dorset down to the Isles of Scilly. The main website has links to themed sub-sites exploring nature, adventure, family and heritage holidays around the region.

The free monthly listings magazine *twenty4-seven* (www.twenty4-seven.co.uk) covers all the latest bars, gigs and clubs, and is available from tourist offices, bars and restaurants around the region.

Activities

CYCLING

Cycling is a great way to appreciate the region's spectacular scenery, but the hills and coastal roads can be tough going. Several sections of the National Cycle Network (NCN) cross the region, including the **West Country Way** (NCN Rte 3), a 250-mile jaunt from Bristol to Padstow via Glastonbury, Taunton and Barnstaple, and the **Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route** (NCN Rte 27), which travels for 102 miles between Exmoor and Dartmoor. The 160-mile circular **Wiltshire Cycleway** runs along the county's borders. The best areas for off-road mountain biking are the North Wessex Downs and Exmoor.

Many cycle trails trace the routes of old railway lines, including the 11-mile **Granite Way** between Okehampton and Lydford and the popular Camel Trail (p334) linking Padstow with Wadebridge.

For further information on cycling trails, contact **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 00 65; www.sustrans.org.uk) or local tourist offices.

WALKING

At 610 miles the **South West Coast Path** is Britain's longest national walking trail. You can pick it up at many points along the coast for a short (and spectacular) day's stroll, or tackle longer stretches between the main coastal towns. The **South West Coast Path Association** (www.swcp.org.uk) publishes an annual guide.

Dartmoor is another favourite location for walkers, with some of the highest hills and best hiking trails in southern England (see p312). Other popular hiking spots include Exmoor (p271), the Mendips (p264) and the Quantock Hills (p264).

In northeast Wiltshire, the **Ridgeway** national trail starts near Avebury and winds 44 miles through chalk hills to meet the River Thames at Goring. The trail then continues another 41 miles (another three days) through the Chiltern Hills.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Water sports are popular along the south coast, especially around Weymouth (p281) and Poole (p277), where you can try everything from kitesurfing to powerboating. Other outdoor pursuits include horse riding and rock climbing on Exmoor and Dartmoor, windsurfing, kitesurfing and kiteboarding on the region's beaches, and scuba diving around Cornwall's coastline and the Isles of Scilly. The adrenaline-fuelled thrills don't stop there, though – caving, coasteering, mountainboarding, wakesurfing and kitebuggying are all popular pastimes in these parts. Check out www.adventuresw.co.uk for info on just about every adventure sport you could think of.

Cornwall is Britain's surfing mecca, with breaks running all the way from Porthleven (near Helston), west around Land's End and along the north coast. Popular spots include Newquay, Perranporth, St Agnes and Bude in Cornwall, and Croyde in north Devon. The latest surf updates can be found online at www.a1surf.com.

Getting Around

It's quite possible to get around the region by bus or train, but as always you'll have much more freedom if you bring your own wheels. Timetables and transport maps for public transport are available from stations and tourist offices, and the handy *Car-Free Days Out* (www.carfreedaysout.com) booklet has public-transport listings.

BUS

The region's bus network is fairly comprehensive, but becomes increasingly patchy the further you move away from the main towns; Dartmoor and west Cornwall are particularly tricky to negotiate. National Express coaches usually provide the quickest routes between cities and larger towns. For regional timetables, call ☎ 01392-382800 in Devon or ☎ 01872-322142 in Cornwall, or contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinesw.com).

The **First group** (☎ 0845 600 1420; www.firstgroup.com) provides the majority of the region's bus services. The First Bus & Rail Card (one/seven days £11/44) allows unlimited travel on First Great Western trains and most First buses in Cornwall and Devon. The pass can be bought from bus drivers and main railway stations. The Firstday Southwest (adult £7) is valid on First buses in Devon and Cornwall, as well as Bristol, Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset.

The PlusBus scheme allows you to add on bus travel around many main towns (including Bristol, Exeter, Bath and Plymouth) to your train ticket from around £2 per day – ask at any train station or check out www.plusbus.info.

CAR

All the main car-hire firms (Hertz, Avis, Budget, Europcar) have offices at airports and main-line train stations. Rates in this region are similar to elsewhere in the UK, starting from around £35 per day for a small hatchback (see p970); one-way and short-term rentals often incur a hefty surcharge. The budget operator **easyCar** (www.easycar.com) often offers the most competitive deals and has branches in Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth and Bath.

TRAIN

The main train line to the southwest follows the historic Great Western Railway route to Bristol, from where there are regular links to London Paddington, as well as services north to Scotland via Birmingham. Bristol also has connections to most other towns across the region including Bath, Swindon, Chippenham, Bradford-on-Avon, Weymouth and Southampton. Trains from London Waterloo also travel to Salisbury, Southampton and Weymouth. Beyond Exeter, the main-line travels west via Liskeard, St Austell, Truro and Penzance, with spur lines to Barnstaple, Paignton, Gunnislake, Looe, Falmouth, St Ives and Newquay.

The Freedom of the SouthWest Rover pass allows unlimited train travel west of Salisbury, Bath, Bristol and Weymouth. It's available in two versions, allowing either three days' travel in one week (£70) or eight days' travel in fifteen (£95). For more information contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) or **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk).

The Devon and Cornwall Rover ticket allows unlimited travel across the rail network throughout Devon and Cornwall. It's available either for three days' travel in one week (£40), or eight days' travel in fifteen (£60).

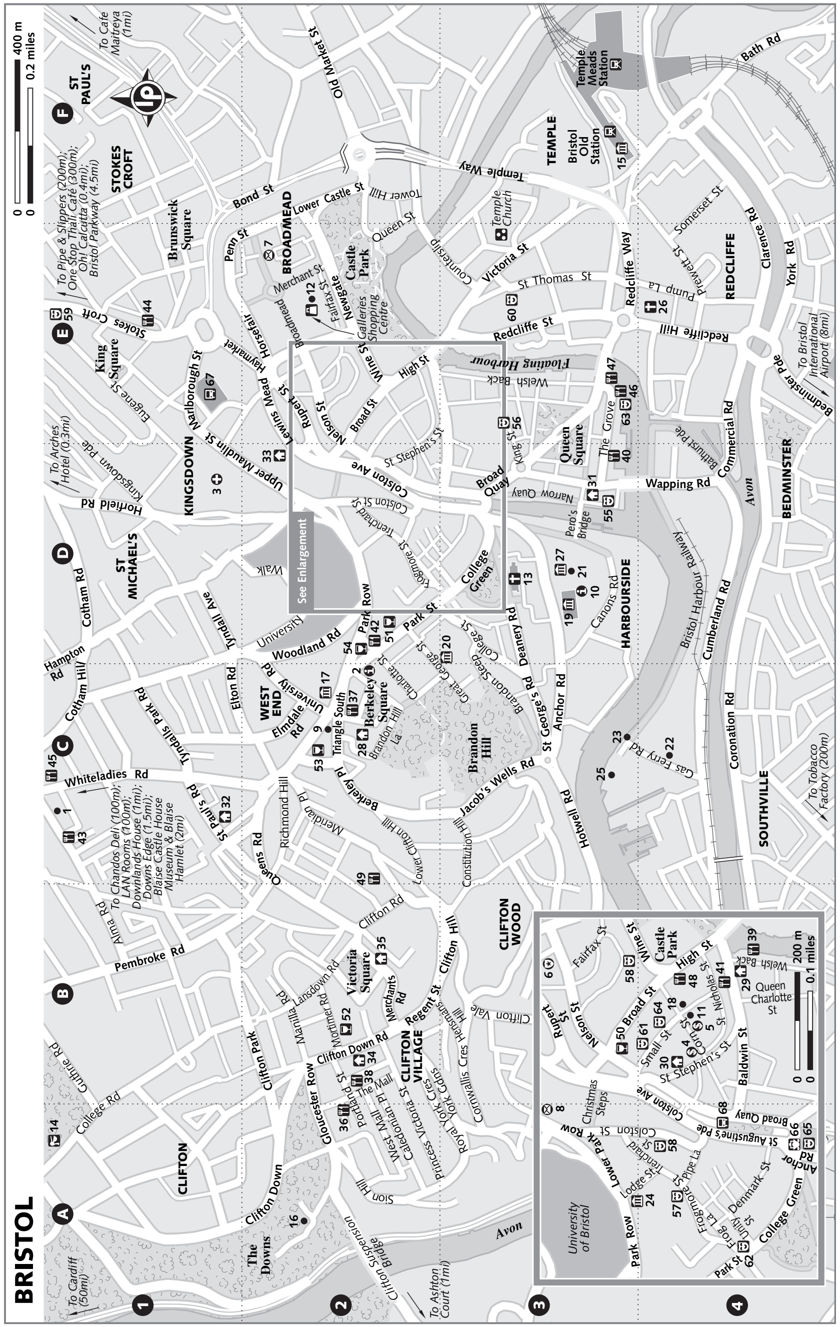
BRISTOL

☎ 0117 / pop 393,300

For years gritty, grimy old Bristol has been the ugly sister of Britain's cities, outclassed by Bath, outsmarted by London and upstaged by the rejuvenated cities of Newcastle and Manchester to the north. But the fortunes of this old industrial city have changed dramatically in recent years, and the transformation that's taken place over the last decade is pretty astonishing. There's a new sense of swagger and self-belief around Bristol these days; while the once-great trades of shipbuilding, manufacturing and the railways have long since sailed upriver, the city has steadily reclaimed its rightful place as an economic powerhouse, gastronomic centre and a cultural force to be reckoned with. The crumbling docks have been prettified and polished up; the streets are packed with cutting-edge restaurants, designer bars and world-class museums; and the city's music, media and nightlife scenes are all showing the rest of the country how things should be done. It's real, raw and just a little rough around the edges, but if you really want to know exactly where Britain's at right now, then Bristol is hard to beat.

HISTORY

A small Saxon village at the confluence of the Rivers Frome and Avon became the thriving medieval Brigstow (later Bristol) as the city began to develop its trade in cloth and wine with mainland Europe. Over the following centuries Bristol became one of Britain's major transatlantic ports, and grew wealthy on the lucrative trade of cocoa, sugar and tobacco – as well as slaves – from Africa to the New World.


BRISTOL
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ST MICHAEL'S
WEST END
HARBOURSIDE
BEDMINSTER
SOUTHVILLE
CLIFTON WOOD
CLIFTON VILLAGE
CLIFTON
The Downs
Temple Meads Station
Bristol Old Station
Floating Harbour
Avon
Castle Park
Brunswick Square
King Square
Berkeley Square
Queen Square
Victoria Square
Brandon Hill
See Enlargement
University of Bristol
Queen Charlotte St
Whiteladies Rd
Park St
Park Row
Woodland Rd
Cotham Hill
Pembroke Rd
Queens Rd
Jacob's Wells Rd
Hotwell Rd
Cumberland Rd
Coronation Rd
Redcliffe Way
Redcliffe Hill
Victoria St
Temple Way
Bath Rd
Wapping Rd
Colston Ave
Marlborough St
Upper Maudlin St
Lower Castle St
Old Market St
Bond St
Stokes Croft
Clifton Hill
Clifton Down
Clifton Suspension Bridge
Bristol Harbour Railway
To Cafe Maitreya (1mi)
To Pipe & Slippers (200m); One Stop Thali Café (300m); Olé Calatta (0.4mi); Bristol Parkway (4.5mi)
To Arches Hotel (0.3mi)
To Chandos Deli (100m); LAN Rooms (100m); Downlands House (1mi); Downs Edge (1.5mi); Blaise Castle House Museum & Blaise Hamlet (2mi)
To Cardiff (50mi)
To Ashton Court (1mi)
To Bristol International Airport (8mi)
To Tobacco Factory (200m)
0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

INFORMATION

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Barclays	(see 5)	
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Police	6	B3
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Post Office	8	A3
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Papadeli	43	C1
Pieminister	44	E1
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During the 18th and 19th centuries Bristol became an important hub for shipbuilding, as well as the terminus for the pioneering Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest. Unfortunately, the city became a target for German bombing during WWII; much of the city centre had been levelled by the time peace was declared in 1945. The postwar rush for reconstruction left Bristol with plenty of concrete carbuncles, but over the last decade the city has undergone extensive redevelopment, especially around the dockside.

ORIENTATION

The city centre, north of the river, is easy to get around on foot but very hilly. The central area revolves around the narrow streets by the markets and Corn Exchange and around the newly developed docklands. Park St is lined with trendy shops and cafés, while a strip of Whiteladies Rd is the hub of bar and restaurant life. The genteel suburb of Clifton, with its Georgian terraces and boutique shops, is on the hilltop west of the centre.

As in any big city, it pays to keep your wits about you after dark, especially around the suburb of St Paul's, just northeast of the centre. It's still a run-down area with a heavy drug scene, and is best not visited alone at night.

The main train station is Bristol Temple Meads, a mile southeast of the centre. Some trains use Bristol Parkway, 5 miles to the north. The bus station is on Marlborough St, northeast of the city centre.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Blackwell's/George's (☎ 927 6602; 89 Park St) This vast bookshop sells both secondhand and new titles.

Waterstone's (☎ 925 2274; The Galleries, Broadmead) General bookshop in the Galleries shopping centre.

Emergency

Police (☎ 927 7777; Nelson St)

Internet Access

LAN Rooms (☎ 973 3886; 6 Cotham Hill; per hr £2.50; 🕒 10am-11pm Mon-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

This is Bristol (www.thisisbristol.com) Web edition of the *Bristol Evening Post*.

Venue (www.venue.co.uk) Online version of Bristol's listings guide, with reviews of clubs, bars and restaurants.

Visit Bristol (www.visitbristol.co.uk) Official tourism website with info on events, accommodation, transport and exploring the city.

What's On Bristol (www.whatsonbristol.co.uk) Useful online city guide with comprehensive listings.

Laundry

Alma Laundrette (☎ 973 4121; 78 Alma Rd; 🕒 7am-9pm)
Redland (☎ 970 6537; Chandos Rd; 🕒 8am-8pm)

Medical Services

Bristol Royal Infirmary (☎ 923 0000; 2 Marlborough St)

Money

You'll find all the main banks along Corn St, including Barclays at number 40, Lloyds at number 55, and NatWest at number 32.

Post

Post office (Upper Maudlin St & The Galleries, Broadmead)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2191; www.visitbristol.co.uk; The Annexe, Wildscreen Walk, Harbourside; 🕒 10am-6pm Mar-Oct; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) Well stocked with leaflets, transport maps and local info, and books accommodation for £3.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 929 4399; 43 Queens Rd)
Trailfinders (☎ 929 9000; 48 Corn St; 🕒 9am-6pm)

SIGHTS

@tBristol

Just off the harbourfront on Millennium Sq, **@tBristol** (☎ 0845 345 1235; www.at-bristol.org.uk; Harbourside; combined tickets Explore & Wildwalk adult/child £15/11, Explore & IMAX £14/10.50, Wildwalk & IMAX £13/10, all three £20/15; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) houses three fantastic attractions under one roof.

Explore (adult/child £9/6.50) is Bristol's impressive science museum, with several zones spanning space, technology and the human brain, as well as the Curiosity Zone, where you can walk through a tornado, spin on a human gyroscope and strum the strings of a virtual harp. It's fun, imaginative and highly interactive, and should keep kids of all ages enthralled for a few hours.

The natural world takes centre stage at **Wildwalk** (adult/child £8/6). Highlights include the steamy Botanical House, which re-creates the rainforest in the heart of Bristol (complete with butterflies and touraco birds) and contains a living replica of a coral reef.

The **IMAX** (adult/child £7/5.50) shows several jaw-dropping 3-D films: subjects range from the moon landings to an African safari, and there's a terrifying sharks documentary that'll put you off taking a bath for a week.

One of Bristol's most famous sons was Cary Grant (aka Archibald Leach), who was born here in 1804; look out for his statue on Millennium Sq.

Museums

The city's municipal **museums** (www.bristol-city.gov.uk/museums) are free, and open 10am to 5pm Saturday to Wednesday unless otherwise stated.

The **City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 922 3571; Queen's Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm daily) is housed in a stunning Edwardian baroque building split into several floors. There's an excellent collection of British and French art on the 1st floor, along with galleries dedicated to ceramics and decorative arts. On the ground floor you'll find the archaeological, geological and natural history wings, as well as the museum's best-known resident, Alfred the Gorilla.

The 18th-century **Georgian House** (☎ 921 1362; 7 Great George St) is an atmospheric illustration of aristocratic life in Bristol during the Georgian era. The six-storeyed house was home to the West India merchant John Pinney, along with his slave Pero (after whom Pero's Bridge across the harbour is named), and is still decorated throughout in period style; the huge kitchen (complete with cast-iron roasting spit) and the grand drawing rooms are particularly impressive.

The Elizabethan **Red Lodge** (☎ 921 1360; Park Row) was built in 1590 but was much remodelled in 1730. The highlight is the Elizabethan Oak Room, which still features its original oak panelling, plasterwork ceiling and carved chimneypiece.

In the northern suburb of Henbury lies **Blaise Castle House Museum** (☎ 950 6789; Henbury Rd), a late-18th-century house and social history museum. Displays include vintage toys, costumes and other Victorian ephemera. Across the road is **Blaise Hamlet**, a cluster of picturesque thatched cottages designed for estate servants by John Nash in 1811. Bus 43 (45 minutes, every 15 minutes) passes the castle from Colston Ave; bus 1 (20 minutes, every 10 minutes) from St Augustine's Pde doesn't stop quite as close, but is quicker and more frequent.

The massive avant-garde **Arnolfini Arts Centre** (☎ 929 9191; www.arnolfini.org.uk; 16 Narrow Quay) has had an impressive face-lift, and remains the top venue in town for dance, photography and art exhibitions.

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

Brunel's marvellous old train station at Temple Meads houses the **British Empire & Commonwealth Museum** (☎ 925 9480; www.empiremuseum.co.uk; Clock Tower Yard; adult/child £6.95/3.95; 🕒 10am-5pm), which tells the story of 500 years of British exploration, trade and conquest. There's everything here from flickering old films to Inuit whalebone sunglasses and a Hawaiian feather cape, and it doesn't skimp on confronting the more gruesome facts of Empire – particularly the issues of slavery and indigenous exploitation.

SS Great Britain

In 1843 Brunel designed the **SS Great Britain** (☎ 929 1843; www.ssgreatbritain.org; adult/child £8.95/4.95; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar), the first transatlantic steamship to be driven by a screw propeller. For 43 years the ship served

BRISTOL IN TWO DAYS

Start off with a tour around Bristol's historic dockside, allowing a few hours to explore the cutting-edge **Arnolfini** (opposite) and the attractions at **@tBristol** (above). Grab some food at **Severnshed** (p253) before cruising down the river aboard the **Bristol Ferry Boat** (p255) to the **SS Great Britain** (opposite). Check into the **Brigstow Hotel** (p252), dine out in style at the **Glassboat** (p253) and catch an evening film at the **Watershed** (p254) if there's time.

On day two catch a bus over to Clifton, stopping at the **Georgian House** (above) and the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (above) en route, before taking a wander around Clifton's many shops, boutiques and cafés. Take an afternoon stroll across the marvellous **suspension bridge** (p250) and around **The Downs** (p250) nearby, and finish up with a slap-up supper at **Quartier Vert** (p253) on Whiteladies Rd.

BRISTOL & BRUNEL

The year 2006 saw the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of Bristol's towering figures, the extravagantly named Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806–59) – industrial genius, pioneering engineer, and general all-round renaissance man.

The precocious young Isambard was picked out for greatness at an early age. Educated at the Lycée Henri-Quatre in Paris and the University of Caen in Normandy, Brunel was barely 20 years old when he was appointed chief engineer of the pioneering Thames Tunnel between Rotherhithe and Wapping in London, designed by his father Marc. The project was fraught with difficulties; foul-smelling river water and explosive gases were a constant threat, and the tunnel was breached twice by serious floods in 1827 and 1828. Brunel was almost drowned during the second flood while trying to rescue trapped workers; while recovering, he entered a competition to design a bridge over the Avon at Clifton. His first submission was rejected along with all the other entries, but the competition was run again in 1831 and this time Brunel's design was awarded first prize. The foundation stone was laid in June of the same year, but sadly Brunel died before his first major commission was completed.

Thankfully he had plenty of opportunity to bask in the glory of his other achievements. During his 30-year career Brunel was responsible for many of the landmark projects of Victorian engineering, including the construction of the first rail bridge over the River Tamar, the foundation of the Great Western Railway line from London to the southwest, and the design of three of the greatest ships the world has ever seen: the ground-breaking transatlantic vessels *Great Western* and *Great Eastern*, as well as the first iron-hulled, screw-propeller steamship, *Great Britain* (below). He also built more than 1000 miles of railway lines, modernised the docks at Bristol, Plymouth and Cardiff, and designed the first prefabricated field hospital for use during the Crimean War.

Despite surviving on a diet of four hours' sleep and 40 cigars a day, and suffering from numerous bouts of ill health, Brunel's closest shave came when he nearly choked to death having accidentally swallowed a coin while performing a conjuring trick for his children. His eventual end was rather more prosaic; he suffered a stroke in 1859, just before the *Great Eastern* made its first voyage to New York, and died 10 days later at the age of 53.

as a luxury ocean-going liner and cargo vessel, but was damaged in 1886 near the Falkland Islands and was later sold off as a coal hulk. The ship was eventually abandoned near Port Stanley; there she remained for several decades, forgotten and rusted, before finally being towed back to Bristol in 1970.

Since then a massive 30-year programme of restoration costing £11.3m has allowed the ship to rediscover her former splendour. Reconstructed rooms include the ship's galley, surgeon's quarters, mess hall, and the Great Engine room, but the highlight is the amazing 'glass sea' on which the ship sits, enclosing an airtight dry dock which preserves the delicate hull. Moored nearby is a replica of John Cabot's ship *Matthew*, which sailed from Bristol to Newfoundland in 1497.

The informative **Maritime Heritage Centre** (☎ 927 9856; Great Western Dockyard, Gas Ferry Rd; admission £6.25; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) houses temporary exhibitions relating to the ship and her illustrious history. The steam-powered **Bristol Harbour Railway** (single/return 60p/£1; 🕒 Sat & Sun Mar-Oct) runs along the dockside.

Clifton & the Suspension Bridge

Bristol's most famous (and photographed) landmark is another Brunel masterpiece, the 76m-high **Clifton Suspension Bridge** (www.clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk), which spans the Avon Gorge from Clifton over to Leigh Woods in northern Somerset. It's a beautiful, graceful sight, and undoubtedly one of Britain's most elegant bridges. Though initial construction work began in 1836, sadly Brunel died before the bridge's completion in 1864. It was mainly designed to carry light horse-drawn traffic and foot passengers, but these days around 12,000 motor vehicles cross it every day – testament to the quality of the bridge's construction and the vision of Brunel's design. It has also become a magnet for stunt artists and suicides; in 1885 Sarah Ann Hedley jumped from the bridge after a lovers' tiff, but her voluminous petticoats parachuted her safely to earth and she lived to be 85.

There's a small **visitor information point** (☎ 9744665; visitinfo@clifton-suspension-bridge.org.uk; 🕒 10-5pm) on the Leigh Woods side; guided tours (£2.50) are available by arrangement.

The grassy parks of **Clifton Down** and **Durdham Down** beside the bridge (often referred to as just The Downs) make a fine spot for a picnic. Nearby, a tatty observatory houses Britain's only **camera obscura** (☎ 974 1242; admission £1; 🕒 from 12.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am Sat & Sun), which offers incredible views of the suspension bridge. Opening hours vary depending on the weather.

Bristol Zoo (☎ 973 8951; www.bristolzoo.org.uk; Clifton; adult/child £10/6; 🕒 9am-5.30pm summer, 9am-5pm winter) is renowned as much for its conservation work as for its exotic residents. Attractions include a group of West African gorillas, underwater walkways for viewing seals and penguins, and a Brazilian rainforest section where you can get up close and personal with agouti, capybara and golden lion tamarins.

See p255 for buses to Clifton and the zoo.

Bristol Cathedral

Originally founded as the church of an Augustinian monastery in 1140, **Bristol Cathedral** (☎ 926 4879; www.bristol-cathedral.co.uk; College Green; 🕒 8am-6pm) has a remarkably fine Norman chapterhouse and gate, while the attractive chapels have eccentric carvings and fine heraldic glass. Although much of the nave and the west towers date from the 19th century, the 14th-century choir has fascinating misericords depicting apes in hell, quarrelling couples and dancing bears. The south transept shelters a rare Saxon carving of the 'Harrowing of Hell', discovered under the chapterhouse floor after a 19th-century fire.

St Mary Redcliffe

Described as 'the fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in England' by Queen Elizabeth I, **St Mary Redcliffe** (☎ 929 1487; www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk; Redcliffe Way; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat summer, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat winter, 8am-7.30pm Sun year-round) boasts a soaring, 89m-high spire, a grand hexagonal porch and a vaulted ceiling decorated with fine gilt bosses. At the entrance to the America Chapel is a whale rib presented to the church by John Cabot as a souvenir of his trip to Newfoundland in 1497.

BRISTOL FOR CHILDREN

There's no shortage of things to keep kids happy in Bristol, with loads of hands-on activities and interesting events. First port of call has to be the brilliant Bristol Zoo (above), where there are enough hairy apes and even hairier spiders to keep the young whippersnappers entertained for hours. For more bugs and beasties, head over to Wildwalk at @Bristol (p248), and the interactive exhibits at the Explore science museum. Then you could join a detective trail in search of the missing ship's cat, Sinbad, at the SS Great Britain (p249), chug along the dockside on the Harbour Railway (opposite), or take a river cruise aboard the Bristol Packet (below). The Bristol Children's Festival kicks off at the beginning of August on The Downs, with four days of puppetry, circus skills, magic and children's theatre, and there are also annual festivals for hot-air balloons and kite-flying (below).

For babysitters try:

Park Lane Nannies (☎ 373 0003; www.parklanenannies.com)

Tinies (☎ 3005630; bristol@tinieschildcare.co.uk)

TOURS

Bristol Highlights Walk (☎ 968 4638; studytours@aol.com; £3.50; 🕒 11am & 2pm Sat Apr-Sep) is a regular tour of the old town, city centre and harbourside, run every Saturday by Bristol's Blue Badge guides; there's no need to book, just turn up outside the tourist office.

Visit Eastside (www.visiteastside.co.uk) offers two free downloadable tours of the multicultural districts of St Paul's and Easton.

City Sightseeing (☎ 926 0767; www.bristolvisitor.co.uk; adult/child £8.50/4; 🕒 10am-4pm Easter-Sep) has a hop-on, hop-off open-top bus visiting all the major attractions. Buses leave St Augustine's Pde hourly (every 30 minutes July to September).

Bristol Packet Boat Trips (☎ 926 8157; www.bristolpacket.co.uk; adult/child £4.25/2.75; 🕒 Mar-Oct) offers cruises around the harbour area, as well as weekend day trips to Avon Gorge (adult/child £11.50/8.50, July to October) and Bath (adult/child £20/15, July to September).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bristol has an ever-expanding programme of annual events. Things kick off in April with **bristolive** (www.bristolive.co.uk), a festival for amateur orchestral groups. The **St Paul's Carnival** (☎ 944 4176) is on the first Saturday of July, swiftly followed by the **Bristol Harbour Festival** (☎ 922 3148), the city's biggest waterside event, and the **Ashton Court Festival** (www.ashtoncourtfestival.co.uk), an outdoor extravaganza of bands, theatre and performing arts held on the Ashton Court estate. Ashton Court is also the venue for the **International Balloon Fiesta** (☎ 953 5884; www.bristolfiesta.co.uk) in August, and the **International Kite Festival** (☎ 977 2002; www.kite-festival.org) in September. Bristol's biggest film festival is the **Encounters Festival** (☎ 929 9188; www.encounters-festival.org.uk), held at the Watershed every November, and there's a **Christmas market** held on various nights in late November and December.

SLEEPING

Bristol is a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to finding a place to stay. There's a great riverside hostel and a couple of stunning top-end hotels, but most of the city-centre business is hoovered up by the bland chain hotels along the river. Pick up the free *Bristol* guide for accommodation listings and a fold-out map.

Budget

Bristol Backpackers (☎ 925 7900; www.bristolbackpackers.co.uk; 17 St Stephen's St; dm/tw £14/36; 🚭 💻) Plump in the heart of town, this ecofriendly independent hostel is a decent budget option, although the private rooms are cramped and the grungy dorms sometimes get very busy in summer. There's cheap internet access (£2 for three hours) and no curfew, so expect some noise on weekends.

Bristol YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5726; bristol@yha.org.uk; Hayman House, 14 Narrow Quay; dm £20, s incl breakfast £25-35, d incl breakfast £40-45; 🚭 💻) In a wonderful spot beside the river, this smartly converted brick warehouse makes a fantastic base, and offers much better value than many of the city's midrange hotels. The modern dorms and doubles are spread over several floors, and the facilities include internet access and the excellent Grainshed coffee lounge.

Midrange

Downlands House (☎ 962 1639; www.downlandshouse.com; 33 Henleaze Gardens; s £38-52, d £55-75; 🚭 💻 wi-fi) Pleasant, uncomplicated bedrooms are scattered around this 19th-century gabled house, perched on the edge of Durdham Down. Pretty curtains, plush carpets and framed watercolour prints (as well as the odd china figurine) characterise the interior décor, and there's free wi-fi throughout.

Downs Edge (☎ 968 3264; www.downsedge.com; Saville Rd; s £48-57, d £71-78; 🚭) This quiet, countrified B&B would be more at home in the Cotswolds than central Bristol. In a fine spot on the edge of the Bristol Downs, overlooking private gardens, the double-gabled house offers a choice of fresh, light-filled rooms filled with antique furniture and frippy furnishings.

Victoria Square Hotel (☎ 973 9058; www.vicsquare.com; Victoria Sq; s £59-89, d £79-99; 🅿 🚭) Despite being owned by the Best Western behemoth, this brick-built pile is the pick of the hotels in Clifton village. It's kitted out with more character than you'd normally expect from a chain-run hotel, with large pocket-sprung beds, pine furniture and lovely views across the wooded square, and all the Clifton nightspots are within easy reach.

Rodney Hotel (☎ 973 5422; rodney@cliftonhotels.com; 4 Rodney Pl; s £64-87, d £79-92; Ⓟ) Shabby chic sums up this venerable hotel, which stands in a glorious terrace of Georgian town houses in the heart of Clifton. A couple of the rooms are really rather grand, with smart furnishings and tasteful pastel fabrics, but most tend towards the scruffy side. The main draw here is the fantastic location, with some of the city's best cafés and brasseries galore right on your doorstep.

Also recommended:

Arches Hotel (☎ 924 7398; www.arches-hotel.com; 132 Cotham Brow; s £28.50-45, d £50.50-58.50; ☒) Great-value eco-conscious guesthouse with huge veggie-only breakfasts.

Clifton Hotel (☎ 973 6882; clifton@cliftonhotels.com; St Paul's Rd; s £64-74, d £79-84; ☒) Decent hotel in the B&B-heavy area around St Paul's Rd, though the rooms are looking tired.

Top End

Berkeley Square Hotel (☎ 925 4000; berkeley@cliftonhotels.com; 15 Berkeley Sq; s £79-129, d £115-139; Ⓟ ☒ 💻) Beautifully situated on a leafy Georgian square, this hip hotel brings baroque imagination to a traditional Bristol town house. Puce and purple sofas and gilt mirrors are dotted around the ice-white lobby and downstairs restaurant. While the bedrooms aren't quite as wacky, they're still luxurious and beautifully appointed, with widescreen TVs, fresh fruit and complimentary sherry.

our pick **Hotel du Vin** (☎ 925 5577; www.hotelduvin.com; Narrow Lewins Mead; d £130-160, ste £185-205; Ⓟ ☒) Manhattan comes to Bristol at the sumptuous Hotel du Vin, housed in six converted warehouses near the city centre. Much of the building's industrial character has been incorporated into the stripped-back rooms: hefty wooden beams and iron pillars sit stylishly alongside the huge futon beds and bespoke furniture. The rooms are named after vintage wines, and all boast plenty of indulgent touches – clawfoot baths, walk-in showers, hi-fis and Egyptian-cotton bathrobes – and if you can afford them, the split-level loft suites are absolutely out of this world.

Brigstow Hotel (☎ 929 1030; www.brigstowhotel.com; Welsh Back; r midweek £149-250, weekend £99-250; ☒ 💻) The concrete-and-glass exterior of this riverside hotel has all the appeal of a municipal car park, but don't be put off by appearances – inside you'll discover one of Bristol's funkiest, freshest places to stay. The plate-glass windows and gleaming wood floors of the lobby set the designer tone, and the same sleek aesthetic is carried into the bedrooms, which boast trendy floating beds, curved wood-panel walls and tiny TVs set into the bathroom tiles.

EATING

Eating out in Bristol is a real highlight – the city is jammed with restaurants ranging from classic British caffs to designer dining emporiums.

Budget

RESTAURANTS

One Stop Thali Café (☎ 942 6687; 12A York Rd; set meal £6.95; 🕑 lunch) For an introduction to Bristol's spicier side, look no further than this wonderful little Indian place in the heart of Montpelier. Students and neighbourhood diners cram into the tiny dining room for the hectic street-market vibe and the fantastic-value set menu, which costs just £6.95 for 6 courses.

Obento (☎ 929 7392; 69 Baldwin St; mains £4-9; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The city has a growing number of Asian eateries, but this is one of the newest and most exciting. Yakitori chicken, fresh sushi and hot noodles are served up in the stark minimalist dining room, as well as authentic 'bento' boxes – a Japanese three-course lunch box that's practically a work of art in itself.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Pieminister (☎ 942 9500; 24 Stokes Croft; pies £3; 🕑 lunch) The great British pie is alive and well at this yummy little eatery, but there's more on offer than just the traditional steak and kidney. All the pies are handmade on the spot and drowned in lashings of mash, gravy and mushy peas – try the creamy Chicken of Aragon or the award-winning Mr Porky Pie.

York Café (☎ 923 9656; 1 York Pl; breakfast £1-5; 🕑 breakfast & lunch) A British greasy spoon from the old school, famous across the city for its huge, heart-stopping all-day fry-up. The tea's served in solid china mugs, the menus are printed on Day-Glo sheets and there's brown sauce and ketchup on every table – what more could you possibly ask for?

Oppo} Music Coffee House (☎ 929 1166; 72 Park St; breakfast £1.50-5, lunch £3-6; 🕑 breakfast & lunch) This excellent little place turns into Bristol's only haiku-café on Thursday and Friday lunchtimes, but it's popular throughout the week for rich Lavazza coffee and herbal teas, as well as a lunchtime menu of Thai fishcakes and hefty sandwiches.

Bar Chocolat (☎ 974 7000; 19 The Mall; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) If there is such a thing as death by chocolate, then this holy temple to the cocoa bean is where you'll find it. There's everything from hot chocolates and chocolate-flavoured coffees to chocolate-chip muffins and chocolate with a Fairtrade conscience – and remember to leave room for some handmade chocolates before you leave.

SELF-CATERING

Papadeli (☎ 973 6569; 84 Alma Rd) A delectable Italian deli stocked with the kind of zesty flavours and sweet treats you'd normally only find in a Tuscan street market. Fresh pasta salads, salami sandwiches and goat's cheese tarts are served in the main café, or you can load up with picnic supplies and Italian cakes at the deli counter.

Chandos Deli (☎ 970 6565; 121 Whiteladies Rd & 6 Princess Victoria St) Gourmet sandwiches, handmade tapas and great takeaway coffee make this a favourite lunch stop for many Bristolians.

St Nicholas Market (Corn St; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The city's lively street market has a bevy of food stalls selling everything from artisan bread to cheese toasties; the best sarnies come from Royce Rolls, while Gallic crêpes are made in the time-honoured fashion at Crêperie.

Midrange & Top End

Clifton Sausage (☎ 973 11192; 7-9 Portland St; mains £8.50-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Despite the name, this Clifton classic isn't just about bangers (although there are eight different varieties, from reindeer and cranberry to traditional toad-in-the-hole). In fact, it's one of Bristol's smartest British gastropubs, with a refined ambience and a menu that takes in everything from Cornish fish to fillet steak and apple crumble.

Oh! Calcutta! Indian Kitchen (☎ 924 0458; 216 Cheltenham Rd; mains £8-12; 🕑 dinner) The best of the cluster of Indian restaurants strung along Cheltenham Rd. Stone-topped tables and back-lit chrome benches fill the vibrant dining room, and the menu is filled with all the usual Indian standards as well as a range of intriguing blackboard specials.

our pick **riverstation** (☎ 914 4434; The Grove; mains £14; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Housed in a dramatic dockside building with an amazing barrelled roof, this swish restaurant has been a favourite with Bristol's fooderati since its opening nine years ago, and has recently been refurbished with vibrant colours and an all-new bar. The food's as good as ever; light lunches, coffee and crumbly pastries define the downstairs café, while up on the first floor it's all effortless elegance and European cuisine.

Severnshed (☎ 925 1212; The Grove; mains from £12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Another stunning, sophisticated restaurant along the old quay, inside a renovated goods shed designed by Brunel. It's a stylish mix of designer bar, modern bistro and waterside café, mixing industrial trappings with contemporary chrome and a floating bar; the 977 menu (served before 7pm) features two courses for £9.77.

Glassboat (☎ 929 0704; Welsh Back; lunch mains £7-8, dinner mains £14-21; 🕑 closed Sun) This double-decked barge is the city's most romantic place to eat, with a fine wood-panelled interior lit by soft globe lanterns, an extensive menu stuffed with British and French country dishes, and dreamy views across the water.

Quartier Vert (☎ 973 4482; 84 Whiteladies Rd; mains £11.50-18.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Consistently featuring in all the major food guides for the last 20-odd years, the split-level QV remains a Bristol big-hitter, with a lovely front patio, a fine ground-floor café and a smart European bistro upstairs. A second branch is due to open up by the harbour in late 2006, housing a deli, bakery and the restaurant's much-respected cookery school.

Cafe Maitreya (☎ 951 0100; 89 St Marks Rd; 3 courses £20.95; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sat) Voted the UK's top vegetarian restaurant two years running, the Maitreya has firmly established itself as one of the city's most inventive eateries. It's a long way from the world of veggie hotpots and bean casseroles: the seasonal menu is renowned for its culinary creativity and dabbles in everything from red onion *tartelette* to cashew nut roulade.

Mud Dock (☎ 934 9734; 40 The Grove; mains £8-16; 🕑 daily) An über-trendy combo of bar, bistro and bike shop, in a brick warehouse by the harbour.

DRINKING

The fortnightly listings magazine *Venue* (www.venue.co.uk; £1.20) contains the latest info on what's hot and what's not in Bristol and Bath. The freebie mag *Folio* is published monthly.

Elbow Room (☎ 930 0242; 64 Park St) Part dimly lit bar, part hustler's pool hall, this is a favourite hang-out for Bristol's style-conscious crowd.

Rack up the balls and knock back the bourbons to a soundtrack of jazz, funk and whatever else is on the playlist. For budding Fast Eddies, there's a pool competition every Monday.

Woods (☎ 925 0890; 1 Park St Ave; 🕐 4pm-2am Sun-Thu, 4pm-4am Fri, 4pm-6am Sat) Run by the same chaps behind the Elbow Room, this high-class drinking hole is split into a main bar, mezzanine and a patio garden dotted with plants and chrome outdoor heaters.

Arc (☎ 922 6546; 27 Broad St; 🕐 noon-2am Tue-Fri, 7pm-2am Sat, 6pm-12.30am Sun) Arguably Bristol's hippest bar, mixing industrial styling and an underground vibe with plenty of hip-hop and electronic beats.

Park (☎ 37 Triangle St West; 🕐 4.30pm-1am Sun-Wed, 4.30pm-2am Thu, 4.30pm-4am Fri & Sat) This place has got the metropolitan bar aesthetic nailed – stripped wood, banquette seats and moody lighting abound, and designer drinks are mixed behind the wood-panelled bar. Funk and hip-hop on Wednesday and Thursday give way to classic beats on weekends.

MBargo (☎ 925 3256; 38-40 Triangle St West; 🕐 noon-2am) New incarnation of an old bar next door to the Park, with a totally overhauled interior heavy on the marble and leather, a huge cocktail list and a selection of weekend DJs.

Hop Pole (☎ 446327; 7 Albion Bldgs) This old-fashioned boozer in Clifton makes a fine stop for a pint of ale, with a mismatched interior filled with eclectic furniture, a huge ticking clock and a reassuringly local crowd.

Pipe & Slippers (☎ 942 7711; 118 Cheltenham Rd) Bath Ales on tap and a menu of Pieminister pies make this pub a reliable choice for late-night drinking, as well as Sunday lunch.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

Watershed (☎ 927 5100; www.watershed.co.uk; 1 Canon's Rd) The city's leading art-house cinema and digital media centre, specialising in new indie releases and the occasional silver-screen classic.

Nightclubs

The Bristol club scene moves fast, so check the latest listings to see where the big nights are happening.

Timbuk2 (22 Small St; admission £5-10; 🕐 9am-2pm) The city's current club tip is this underground venue crammed into a labyrinth of caverns and arches just off Corn St. The regular breaks, house and drum'n'bass nights usually get the seal of approval.

Native (☎ 930 4217; www.nativebristol.co.uk; 15 Small St; admission £5-8) Jointly run by a trio of Bristol trendsetters, this tiny, 200-cover club is making waves on the Bristol circuit, with drum'n'bass on Tuesday, Latin and soul during the week, and resident DJs on weekends, including Bristol-based names Ben Dubuisson and Boca45.

Thekla (☎ 929 3301; www.thekla.co.uk; The Grove; admission £5-7) Longstanding two-floored club in a converted ship by the harbour, with DJs and dance floor downstairs, and a chill-out zone on the upper level. The house night on Friday and the Espionage night on Saturday are always crammed.

Nocturne (☎ 929 2555; 1 Unity St) A hyper-exclusive members club part owned by Massive Attack, with a decadent designer vibe and notoriously fussy bouncers, so smarten up your act and start queuing early.

Carling Academy (☎ 0870 711 2000; Frogmore St; admission £6-10) Bristol's original superclub can hold a 2000-strong crowd on its biggest nights, but it's practically never that busy. There's indie and R&B during the week and big house nights on weekends.

Theatre

Bristol Old Vic (☎ 987 7877; www.bristol-old-vic.co.uk; King St) The city's oldest theatre stages big touring productions, with occasional forays into comedy and dance.

Tobacco Factory (☎ 902 0344; www.tobaccofactory.com; Raleigh Rd) This small-scale theatre venue stages cutting-edge drama and dance. Catch bus 24 or 25 from Broadmead to the Raleigh Rd stop.

Live Music

Big names tend to play at the Carling Academy (see above), while a host of smaller venues feature emerging acts.

Fleece & Firkin (☎ 945 0996; www.fleecegigs.co.uk; St Thomas St) A small, intimate venue, much favoured by indie artists and breaking names on the local scene.

Colston Hall (☎ 922 3686; www.colstonhall.org; Colston St) The biggest concert hall in Brizzle, hosting everything from big-name comedy to touring bands.

Croft (☎ 987 4144; www.the-croft.com; 117-119 Stokes Croft) Chilled venue with a policy of supporting new names and Bristol-based artists. There's usually no cover charge if you arrive by 10pm Sunday to Thursday.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Bristol International Airport (☎ 0870 121 2747; www.bristolairport.co.uk) is 8 miles southwest of town. Most flights are holiday charters but there are also scheduled flights to European destinations.

Air Southwest (☎ 0870 241 6830; www.airsouthwest.com) Several UK destinations including Newquay, Plymouth and Jersey.

British Airways (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.ba.com) Flies to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Paris.

easy Jet (☎ 0870 600 0000; www.easyjet.com) Budget flights to UK destinations including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Inverness and Belfast, plus several European cities.

Bus

National Express coaches go to Birmingham (£16.60, two hours, eight daily), London (£16.50, 2½ hours, at least hourly), Cardiff (£6.50, 1¼ hours, two daily) and Exeter (£11.60, two hours, four daily). There's also a direct daily bus to Nottingham (£24.50, 4¾ hours) and Oxford (£13, three hours).

Buses X39 (one hour, several per hour) and 332 (50 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday) run to Bath. Bus 375/376 goes to Wells (one hour) and Glastonbury (1¼ hours) every half-hour during the week and hourly on Sunday. There are buses to most destinations around Somerset and Wiltshire from Bath and Wells.

Train

Bristol is an important rail hub, with regular connections to London (£58, 1¼ hours), Exeter (£17.60, 1¼ hours), Plymouth (£44, 2½ hours) and Penzance (£73, four hours). Virgin Trains travel north to Glasgow (£97, 5¾ hours, five direct daily) via Birmingham (£29.50, 1½ hours, eight direct daily). Most main-line trains arrive at Bristol Temple Meads.

Bath makes an easy day trip (single £5.20, 11 minutes, four per hour).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bristol International Flyer runs buses (single/return £5/7, 30 minutes, half-hourly 5am to 11pm) to the airport from Marlborough St bus station and Temple Meads train station. A taxi to the airport costs around £25.

Bicycle

Hilly as Bristol is, masochists might want to hire bikes at **Blackboy Hill Cycles** (☎ 973 1420; 180 Whiteladies Rd; per day £10; 🕐 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Boat

The nicest way to commute around the city is with the **Bristol Ferry Boat Co** (☎ 927 3416; www.bristolferryboat.co.uk), which runs two routes: one from the city centre to Temple Meads (one hour, six to 10 daily April to October, weekends only November to March), stopping at Bristol Bridge and Castle Park; and one from the city centre to Hotwells (40 minutes, 12 to 16 daily year-round), stopping at Mardyke and the SS *Great Britain*. A single fare is £1.50, or you can pay £6 for a day's unlimited travel.

Bus

Buses run from Parkway Station to the centre every 15 minutes (30 minutes). Buses 8 and 9 run every 15 minutes to Clifton (10 minutes), Whiteladies Rd and Bristol Zoo from St Augustine's Pde; add another 10 minutes from Temple Meads.

FirstDay tickets (adult/child £4.40/2.70) are valid on all buses for one day in the Greater Bristol area. The FirstFamily ticket (£7) buys one day's travel for two adults and three children, but is only valid after 9am Monday to Friday.

Car & Motorcycle

Bristol's traffic can be a real headache, and the city has a seriously confusing one-way system – you'd be better off avoiding driving altogether or using the **Park & Ride** (☎ 922 2910; return Mon-Fri before 10am £3, after 10am Mon-Fri £2.50, Sat £2; every 10min Mon-Sat), which operates from Portway, Bath Rd and Long Ashton. They're well signed on routes into the city.

WORTH THE TRIP

Tyntesfield (NT; ☎ 01275 461900; Wraxall; adult £9; 🕐 11am-5pm Sat, Sun, Mon & Wed) Formerly the aristocratic home of the Gibbs family, this ornate Victorian pile has recently been acquired by the National Trust (NT). Prickling with spiky turrets and towers, the house was built in grand Gothic Revival style by architect John Norton and is crammed with Victorian decorative arts, a working kitchen garden and a magnificent private chapel. The house is currently undergoing extensive renovation, so it's still a work in progress – call ahead for the latest updates.

BATH

☎ 01225 / pop 90,144

Ask any visitor for their ideal image of an English city, and chances are they'll come up with something pretty close to Bath – an architectural icon, cultural trendsetter and fashionable haunt for the last three centuries. With its grand Georgian terraces, Palladian parades and lofty town houses of honey-coloured stone, it's one of Britain's most attractive cities, and still exudes an air of gentility and chi-chi sophistication – in fact, Bath boasts more listed buildings than almost anywhere else in the country. The whole city has been named a World Heritage Site by Unesco, and it's blessed with a wealth of architectural wonders, including the glorious Royal Crescent and one of the world's finest Roman spas. But it's not without its problems: the hills are knackering, the bars are snooty, the hotels are expensive, and the rush-hour traffic will have you weeping into your steering wheel, but despite all the niggles, it's impossible not to fall in love with this finely-wrought jewel in England's crown.

HISTORY

Prehistoric peoples probably knew about the hot springs, and legend has it that King Bladud, a Trojan refugee and father of King Lear, founded the town some 2800 years ago. He was supposedly cured of leprosy by a bath in the muddy swamps. The Romans established the town of Aquae Sulis in AD 44 and built the extensive baths complex and a temple to the goddess Sulis-Minerva.

Long after the Romans had departed, the Anglo-Saxons arrived and in 944 a monastery was founded on the site of the present abbey. Throughout the Middle Ages, Bath was an ecclesiastical centre and a wool-trading town and it wasn't until the early 18th century that Ralph Allen and Richard 'Beau' Nash made Bath the centre of fashionable society. Allen developed the quarries at Coombe Down, constructed Prior Park (p259) and employed the two John Woods (father and son) to create the glorious buildings you see today.

As the 18th century wore on, Beau Nash lost his influence and sea bathing started to draw visitors away from Bath; by the mid-19th century the city was thoroughly out of fashion. Fortunately, most of Bath's grand architecture has been preserved.

ORIENTATION

Like Rome, Bath is famed for its seven hills, and although the city centre is compact it will test your legs. Most street signs are carved into the golden stone of the buildings.

The train and bus stations are both south of the tourist office at the end of Manvers St. The most obvious landmark is the abbey, across from the Roman Baths and Pump Room.

INFORMATION

Bath Quarterly (www.bathquarterly.com) Guide to sights, accommodation, restaurants and events.

Click (☎ 481008; 13A Manvers St; internet per 20min £1; 🕑 10am-10pm)

Laundrette (4 St Margarets Bldgs; per load £2; 🕑 6am-9pm)

Main post office (☎ 0845 722 3344; 25 New Bond St)

Retailer Internet (☎ 443181; 12 Manvers St; per 20min £1; 🕑 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun)

Royal United Hospital (☎ 428331; Combe Park)

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2000, call per min 50p; www.visitbath.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; 🕑 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

What's On (www.whatsonbath.co.uk) Up-to-date listing of the city's events and nightlife.

SIGHTS

Baths

Ever since the Romans arrived in Bath, life in the city has revolved around the three natural springs that bubble up near the abbey. In typically ostentatious style, the Romans constructed a glorious complex of bathhouses above the springs to take advantage of their natural hot water, which emerges from the ground at a constant temperature of 46°C. The buildings were left to decay after the Romans departed and, apart from a few leprous souls who came looking for a cure in the Middle Ages, it wasn't until the end of the 17th century that Bath's restorative waters again became fashionable.

The site now forms one of the best-preserved ancient Roman spas in the world. The **Roman Baths Museum** (☎ 477785; www.romanbaths.co.uk; Abbey Churchyard; adult/child £10/6, incl Museum of Costume £13/7.60; 🕑 9am-6pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-10pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Nov-Feb) gets very, very busy in summer; visit outside July and August if you possibly can. An audio guide (read by bestselling author Bill Bryson) is included in the admission price.

The first sight inside the complex is the **Great Bath**. Head down to water level and along the raised walkway to see the Roman paving and lead base. A series of excavated passages and chambers beneath street level lead off in several directions and let you inspect the remains of other smaller baths and hypocaust (heating) systems.

The 12th-century **King's Bath** was built around the original sacred spring; 1.5 million litres of hot water still pour into the pool every day. You can see the ruins of the vast 2000-year-old **Temple of Sulis-Minerva** under the Pump Room, and recent excavations of the **East Baths** give an insight into its 4th-century form.

Head outside to Bath St and note the colonnaded arcade, constructed so bathers could walk between the town's three main baths without getting wet. At the end of Bath St stands the **Cross Bath**, where Mary of Modena, wife of James II, erected a cross in gratitude for her pregnancy in 1688. Opposite is the **Hot Bath**, the third bath built over Bath's hot springs. These two historic sites have been restored and, together with the Hetling Pump Room, now form part of the **Thermae Bath Spa** (☎ 331234; www.thermaebathspa.com; Hot Bath St), a steel-and-glass complex that's ruffled many local feathers thanks to its super-modern design. The privately owned enterprise was originally due to open in 2002, but has been beset by countless legal problems and a spiralling construction budget. It finally opened its doors to the general public in late summer of 2006.

Bath Abbey

Edgar, the first king of united England, was crowned in a church in Abbey Courtyard in 973, but the present **Bath Abbey** (☎ 422462; www.bathabbey.org; requested donation £2.50; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Easter, afternoons only Sun) was built between 1499 and 1616, making it the last great medieval church raised in England. The nave's wonderful fan vaulting was erected in the 19th century.

The most striking feature of the abbey's exterior is the west façade, where angels climb up and down stone ladders, commemorating a dream of the founder, Bishop Oliver King. The abbey boasts the second-largest collection of wall monuments after Westminster Abbey. Among those buried here are Sir Isaac Pitman, who devised the Pitman method of shorthand, and Beau Nash.

On the abbey's southern side, steps lead down to the small **Heritage Vaults Museum** (🕑 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), which explores the abbey's history and its links with the nearby baths. It also contains fine stone bosses, archaeological artefacts and a weird model of the 10th-century monk Aelfric, dressed in his traditional black Benedictine habit.

Royal Crescent & The Circus

The crowning glory of Georgian Bath is Royal Crescent, a semicircular terrace of majestic houses overlooking the green sweep of Royal Victoria Park. Designed by John Wood the Younger (1728–82) and built between 1767 and 1775, the houses would have originally been rented by the season by wealthy socialites.

For a glimpse into the splendour and razzle-dazzle of Georgian life, head for **Number 1 Royal Crescent** (☎ 428126; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov), which has been restored with painstaking detail. Only materials available during the 18th century were used during its refurbishment, so it's about as authentically Georgian as you can get; sadly, the same can't be said for the endearingly hammy staff dressed in period costume.

A walk along Brock St leads to **The Circus**, a magnificent circle of 30 houses. Plaques on the houses commemorate famous residents such as Thomas Gainsborough, Clive of India and David Livingstone. To the south is the restored 18th-century **Georgian Garden**, where gravel replaces grass to protect women's long dresses from unsightly stains.

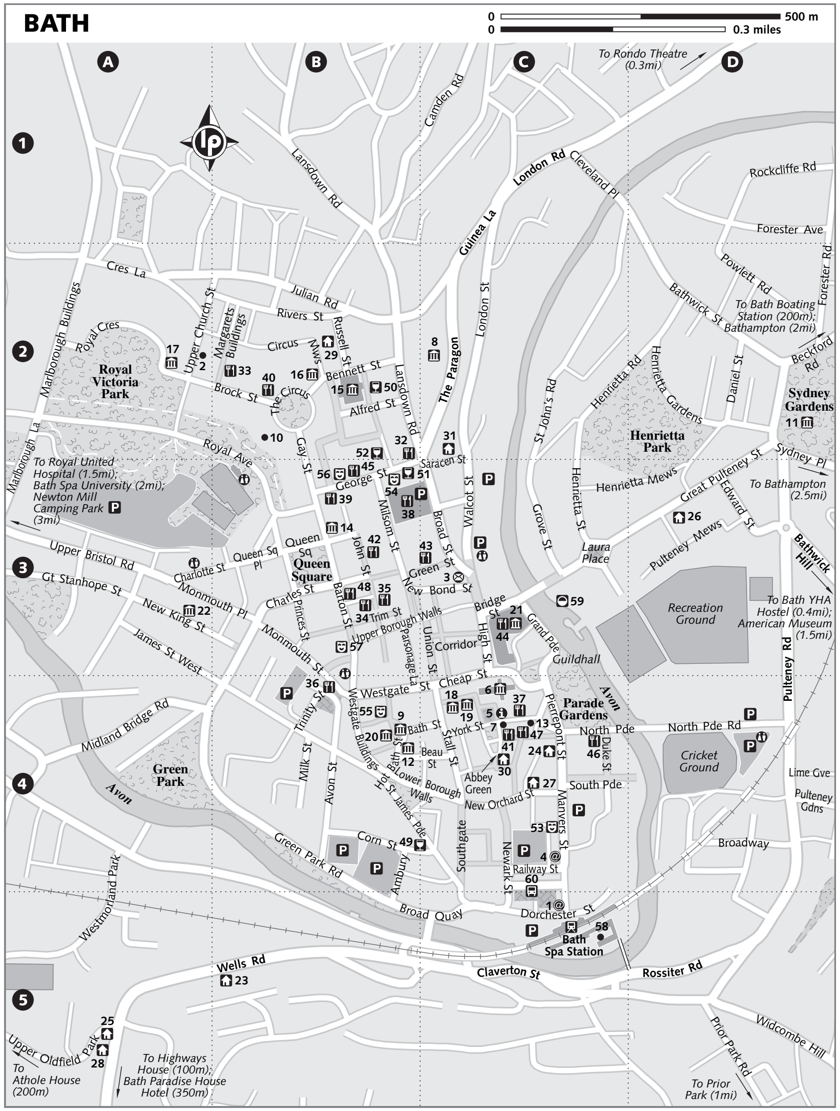
Assembly Rooms & Museum of Costume

Opened in 1771, the city's glorious **Assembly Rooms** (☎ 477785; www.museumofcostume.co.uk; Bennett St; 🕑 11am-6pm Mar-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Feb) are where fashionable Bath socialites once gathered to waltz, play cards and listen to the latest chamber music. You can visit the rooms as long as they haven't been reserved for a special function; highlights include the card room, tearoom and ballroom, all lit by their original 18th-century chandeliers.

In the basement is the **Museum of Costume** (adult/child £6.50/4.50, incl Roman Baths Museum £13/7.60), displaying costumes worn from the 16th to late 20th centuries. There's an audio guide to talk you through the fickle vagaries of fashion.

Jane Austen Centre

Bath is perhaps best known as the location for the novels of Jane Austen, who visited the city many times throughout her life, and lived here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Cres La
Julian Rd
Rivers St
Marlborough Buildings
Royal Cres
Royal Victoria Park
Upper Church St
Margarets Buildings
Circus Mws
Russell St
Bennett St
Alfred St
Brock St
The Circus
Lansdown Rd
The Paragon
London St
St John's Rd
Henrietta Rd
Henrietta Gardens
Daniel St
Sydney Gardens
Henrietta Park
Sydney Pl
Great Pulteney St
To Bathampton (2.5mi)
Marlborough La
Royal Ave
To Royal United Hospital (1.5mi); Bath Spa University (2mi); Newton Mill Camping Park (3mi)
Gay St
George St
Saracen St
Walcot St
Grove St
Henrietta St
Henrietta Mews
Edward St
Pulteney Mews
Laura Place
Queen Sq Pl
Queen Sq
Queen Square
John St
Milsom St
Broad St
Bathwick Hill
Upper Bristol Rd
Gt Stanhope St
Charlotte St
Monmouth Pl
New King St
Charles St
Princes St
Barton St
Trim St
Upper Borough Walls
Green St
New Bond St
Bridge St
Grand Pde
Recreation Ground
To Bath YHA Hostel (0.4mi); American Museum (1.5mi)
James St West
Monmouth St
Union St
Parsonage La
Corridor
High St
Guildhall
Pulteney Rd
Westgate St
Cheap St
Avon
Parade Gardens
North Pde
North Pde Rd
Midland Bridge Rd
Trinity St
Westgate Buildings
Bath St
York St
Beau St
Stall St
Pierrepont St
Duke St
Cricket Ground
Lime Gve
Pulteney Gdns
Green Park
Milk St
Avon St
Lower Borough Walls
St James Pde
Abbey Green
New Orchard St
South Pde
Manvers St
Avon
Green Park Rd
Corn St
Ambury
Southgate
Newark St
Railway St
Broadway
Westmorland Park
Broad Quay
Dorchester St
Bath Spa Station
Wells Rd
Claverton St
Rossiter Rd
Widcombe Hill
Upper Oldfield Park
Prior Park Rd
To Athole House (200m)
To Highways House (100m); Bath Paradise House Hotel (350m)
To Prior Park (1mi)

from 1801 to 1806 (a plaque marks one of her former houses at 4 Sydney Pl, opposite the Holburne Museum). *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were both largely set in Bath, and the **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 443000; www.janeausten.co.uk; 40 Gay St; admission £4.45; 🕐 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun) explores the author's connections with the city. Its displays include period costume, contemporary prints of Bath and lots of exhibits relating to the author's life.

Other Museums

The fine 18th-century **Holburne Museum** (☎ 466669; Great Pulteney St; admission £5.50; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) houses the booty of Sir William Holburne, a 19th-century Bath resident who brought together an outstanding collection of porcelain, antiques, and paintings by great 18th-century artists such as Gainsborough, Turner and Guardi.

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Housed in an 18th-century Gothic chapel, the **Building of Bath Museum** (☎ 333895; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk; The Vineyards; admission £4; 🕐 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Feb–Nov) details how Bath's Georgian splendour came into being, tracing the city's evolution from a sleepy spa town into one of the centres of Georgian society. There are some intriguing displays on contemporary construction methods, and the museum also explores the way in which social class and interior décor were intimately linked during the Georgian era; heaven forbid you should use a wallpaper that outstripped your station!

In 1781 the astronomer William Herschel discovered Uranus from the garden of his home, which now houses the **William Herschel Museum** (☎ 311342; 19 New King St; admission £3.50; 🕐 1-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Feb-Nov). The house is decorated as it would have been in the 18th century; an astrolabe in the garden marks where Herschel would probably have placed his telescope.

The **Victoria Art Gallery** (☎ 477233; www.victoriagal.org.uk; Pulteney Bridge; admission free; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun) houses the city's main art collection, mainly dating from the 15th to 20th centuries. There are some particularly fine canvases by Gainsborough, Turner and Sickert, as well as a wonderful series of Georgian caricatures from the wicked pens of artists such as James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson.

The **Museum of East Asian Art** (☎ 464640; www.meaa.org.uk; 12 Bennett St; admission £4; 🕐 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) contains more than 500 jade, bamboo, porcelain and bronze objects from Cambodia, Korea and Thailand, and substantial Chinese and Japanese carvings, ceramics and lacquerware.

The **American Museum** (☎ 460503; www.americanmuseum.org; Claverton Manor; 🕐 noon-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar–Oct) houses a collection of stateside artefacts, memorabilia and furniture darting from the 17th century to the Civil War. There are 15 individually decorated rooms scattered around the manor house, including a suitably sparse Shaker Room, and a New Orleans room in the lavish style of a plantation villa. Even the trees and plants in the surrounding grounds have a Yankee provenance. The museum is 2 miles southeast of the city centre; bus 18 and several other buses to the university stop nearby.

Prior Park

The celebrated landscape gardener Capability Brown and the satirical poet Alexander Pope both had a hand in the creation of **Prior Park** (NT; ☎ 833 422; Ralph Allen Dr; admission £4.50; 🕐 11am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Feb-Nov, 11am-dusk Fri-Sun Dec & Jan), an 18th-century ornamental garden dreamt up by the local entrepreneur Ralph Allen. Cascading lakes, a Gothic temple and a famous

Palladian bridge can be found around the garden's winding walks, and the sweeping views over the Bath skyline are something to behold.

Prior Park is 1 mile south of the centre; it can be reached on foot or by bus (2 or 4, every 10 minutes), as well as on the City Skyline tour (below).

TOURS

GUIDED TOURS

Free two-hour **Mayor's Guide walking tours** (☎ 477411; www.thecityofbath.co.uk) leave from outside the Pump Room at 10.30am and 2pm Sunday to Friday, 10.30am on Saturday. From May to September there are additional tours at 7pm on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.

For something less reverential, try **Bizarre Bath Comedy Walks** (☎ 335124; www.bizarrebath.co.uk; adult/child £7/5; ⏰ 8pm Mar-Sep), a chaotic and frequently hilarious blend of street theatre, live performance and guided tour. Tours leave from outside the Huntsman Inn on North Pde Passage and last about 1½ hours.

Jane Austen's Bath (☎ 443000; adult/child £4.50/3.50) focuses mainly on the Georgian city and various sites associated with the author, with plenty of history and cultural context thrown in. Tours leave from the Abbey Churchyard at 11am on Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays.

Tourist Tracks (www.tourist-tracks.com/tours/bath) offers a couple of self-guided MP3 tours you can download (£5) or hire from the tourist office (half-/full day £6/10).

Bath Bus Company (☎ 01225 330444; www.bathbuscompany.com) provides a hop-on, hop-off **city tour** (adult/child £9.50/5; ⏰ 9.30am-5pm, later in summer) with commentary in seven languages. Buses stop every 20 minutes or so at various points around town. There's also a second route, the **Skyline tour**, that travels out to Prior Park; the same tickets are valid on both routes.

The **Heritage Hopper Tour** (☎ 01225 838621; £19.95 incl 4 children; ⏰ spring-autumn) includes bus travel and admission to the Holburne Museum, American Museum and Prior Park.

BOAT TRIPS

Various cruise operators offer boat trips up and down the River Avon; try **Bath City Boat Trips** (☎ 07974 560197; www.bathcityboattrips.com) or **Avon Cruising** (☎ 0779 1910650; pulteneyprincess@tiscali.co.uk), which both operate from Pulteney Weir. For cruises to Bristol, see p251.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The annual **Bath Literature Festival** (☎ 463362; www.bathlitfest.org.uk) takes place in early March, and attracts bookworms and big-name authors alike.

From mid-May to early June the **Bath International Music Festival** (www.bathmusicfest.org.uk) takes over the city, with a main programme of classical music and opera, as well as jazz, world and folk gigs in the city's smaller venues. The **Bath Fringe Festival** (www.bathfringe.co.uk) hits town around the same time; it's the biggest fringe festival in Britain after Edinburgh, with all kinds of theatre shows and street acts dotted around town.

The highlight of the **Jane Austen Festival** (www.janeaustenfestival.co.uk) in September is a grand Georgian costumed parade through the city's streets. Bath's **film festival** (www.bathfilmfestival.org.uk) takes place in the last two weeks in September, followed by the annual **Mozartfest** (www.bathmozartfest.org.uk) in mid-October.

Bookings for all events are handled by the **Bath Festivals box office** (☎ 463362; www.bathfestivals.org.uk; 2 Church St; ⏰ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

SLEEPING

Bath features on practically everyone's tourist itinerary, and finding a bed during busy periods can be challenging. The tourist office will book rooms for a £3 fee, and sells an excellent brochure, *Bath & Beyond* (£1), available free through the website.

Budget

YMCA (☎ 325900; www.bathymca.co.uk; International House, Broad St Pl; dm £13-18, d & tw from £36) A brilliantly located hostel in the heart of Bath, with excellent facilities including a health suite, internet access and an on-site café. The functional décor is a bit bland, but you can't beat the price or the location.

Bath YHA Hostel (☎ 465674; bath@yha.org.uk; dm £12.50, d from £35; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻) Hostels don't come any grander than this Italianate mansion, a steep climb uphill (or a short hop on bus 18) from the city centre. Despite the period exterior, the refurbished rooms are surprisingly modern and many look out across the private tree-lined gardens.

Bath Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 446787; bath@hostels.co.uk; 13 Pierrepont St; dm £12-13; 💻) The city's only independent hostel is a typically chaotic affair, with bunk beds crammed into the smallish dorms, and a rather modest kitchen. The run-down décor's livened up by the odd wall mural and funky feature, and there's a party 'dungeon' in the cellar – but the lack of any curfew can mean late-night noise is a problem.

Henry (☎ 424052; 6 Henry St; www.thehenry.com; s £35, d £60-65; ⊠) Run by the same people who own Three Abbey Green, this excellent budget option shows the same attention to detail and personable service but at a knock-down price. The furniture's a tad generic and the street noise is a headache, but it's great value for money.

Midrange

Oldfields (☎ 317984; www.oldfields.co.uk; 102 Wells Rd; s £45-69, d £65-99; Ⓟ ⊠) One of the best deals in Bath. The huge lemon-stone Victorian house commands sweeping views across the city, and offers lots of spacious, heritage-style rooms decked out in Laura Ashley fabrics and patterned wallpaper, with the odd oil painting and half-tester bed thrown in for good measure.

Bath Paradise House Hotel (☎ 317723; www.paradise-house.co.uk; 86-88 Holloway; d £65-110; Ⓟ ⊠) This fabulous chimney-topped villa enjoys one of the most breathtaking hilltop locations in the whole city. It's tucked away in private walled gardens and decorated in charmingly old-world style, with a surfeit of frills, antiques and gleaming en suite bathrooms (some with Jacuzzis). Rooms 4 and 5 have the best views, and are unsurprisingly more expensive.

Athole House (☎ 320009; www.atholehouse.co.uk; 33 Upper Oldfield Park; s £52-62, d £72-82; Ⓟ 💻) This cosy guesthouse swaps showiness for superb value, with modernised rooms furnished in plain pine, pastel colours and simple furniture. Owner Wolfgang is a mine of local information and cooks up a mean brekkie of buttermilk pancakes, Swiss muesli and home-baked bread.

Dorian House (☎ 426336; www.dorianhouse.co.uk; 1 Upper Oldfield Park; s £65-78, d £65-140; Ⓟ ⊠) It's pricey, but this three-storey late-Victorian mansion is worth the extra cash. The rooms are all named after famous composers and feature a mix of turn-of-the-century grandeur and French Riviera chic; some opt for almond-coloured carpets, gingham checks and leather bedbacks, while others go the full Victorian hog, with four-poster beds and varnished dressing tables.

Three Abbey Green (☎ 428558; www.threeabbeygreen.com; 3 Abbey Green; d £85-100; ⊠) On a secluded terrace just steps from Bath Abbey, this fine B&B is a fantastic trade-off between location and price. The rooms are plain, smart and plushly finished with muted colours, huge beds and sparkling white linen; pick of the bunch is the Lord Nelson suite, which has a private sitting area and gas fire, as well as a regal four-poster bed.

Other recommended options:

Abbey Rise (☎ 316177; www.abbeyrise.co.uk; 97 Wells Rd; s £38-48, d £45-68; Ⓟ ⊠) Attractively refurbished, contemporary B&B whose owner trained as a housekeeper at Buckingham Palace.

Highways House (☎ 421238; www.highwayshouse.co.uk; 143 Wells Rd; d £69-75; Ⓟ ⊠ 💻 wi-fi ♿) Family-run guesthouse with pastel-flavoured rooms and wi-fi.

Top End

our pick **Queensberry Hotel** (☎ 447928; www.thequeensberry.co.uk; Russell St; s £105-145, d £105-205; Ⓟ ⊠) A favourite haunt for fashionistas and style gurus, the Queensberry comprises four Georgian town houses that have been combined into one of the city's top boutique hotels. Modern fabrics, period architecture and a muted colour palette make for a supremely chic sleep.

Dukes (☎ 787960; www.dukesbath.co.uk; Great Pulteney St; s £115, d £155-215; Ⓟ) The rooms at this Grade I–listed Palladian pile are some of the most extravagant you'll find in Bath. There's a choice of themes – Oriental finery, Italianate splendour, English botanica or French baroque – and all of the bedrooms are crammed with original cornicing and carved plasterwork.

Royal Crescent Hotel (☎ 823333; www.royalcrescent.co.uk; 16 Royal Cres; d £290-390, suites £530-850; Ⓟ ⊠ 🏊) The original luxury hotel in Bath is still leading the way in terms of pomp and pageantry. This is about as close as you'll get to staying in a royal palace; the rooms are furnished with an astonishing array of period furniture and antiques, from original oil paintings to chandeliers and chaise longues.

EATING

Budget

RESTAURANTS

Walrus & the Carpenter (☎ 314864; 28 Barton St; mains £7-15; ⏰ lunch & dinner) The food's far from *haute cuisine* at this time-honoured restaurant, but that's all part of its considerable charm. The tables are packed in tight around its warren of candlelit rooms, and the menu is divided into 'befores' and 'afters'. The huge burgers and kebabs are always popular, and there's a good selection of veggie mains too.

Sally Lunn's (☎ 461634; 4 North Pde Passage; lunch £5-6, dinner mains from £8) There are some things you just *have* to do when you come to Bath, and one of them is to have afternoon tea at

Sally Lunn's. There's been a tearoom and bakery on this site since the 18th century; the atmosphere is as frilly and English as ever, but it's the trademark Sally Lunn's bun that's still packing in the crowds.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Café Réné (☎ 447147; Shires Yard; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) This delightful café has an air of Paris' Left Bank thanks to its lovely courtyard terrace and an authentic menu of baguettes, croissants, *croques-monsieurs* (toasted cheese-and-ham sandwiches) and *moules marinières* (mussels cooked in white wine).

Adventure Café (☎ 462038; 5 Princes Bldgs; mains £3-6) Big city style in little city Bath. Huge plate-glass windows, dark wood floors and laid-back tunes conjure a sophisticated metropolitan atmosphere at this trendy café-bar, which is as popular for a lunchtime ciabatta as for a late-night Bud.

Café Retro (☎ 339347; 18 York St; mains £5-11) Retro by name, retro by nature, this popular boho hang-out is the perfect venue for a light lunch or an extended coffee break. If you don't feel like sitting in, grab a sandwich and a takeaway coffee from Retro2Go and head for a picnic in the Parade Gardens nearby.

Boston Tea Party (☎ 313901; 19 Kingsmead Sq; 🕒 Mon-Sat) With a lovely outside terrace spilling onto Kingsmead Sq, the Bath outpost of this small southwest franchise is always full to bursting at lunchtime thanks to its prodigious selection of sandwiches, homemade soups and sweet treats.

SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers should head for the covered **Guildhall Market** (High St), where you'll find crêpes and other takeaway food.

Blackstones (☎ 338803; 10 Queen St; mains £2-7; 🕒 Mon-Sat) This fantastic gourmet takeaway is such good value you might never need to pick up a pan again. Delicious dishes such as rich cottage pie, Italian casserole and Chinese noodles are served either in the small café or packed up for the ultimate take-home meal.

Chandos Deli (☎ 314418; George St; 🕒 Mon-Sat) Gourmet sarnies, fresh pasta and Italian cakes are the mainstays at this excellent deli, perfect for stocking up on picnic supplies.

Midrange

Bistro Papillon (☎ 310064; 2 Margarets Bldgs; 2-course lunch £8.50, mains £11-15; 🕒 Tue-Sat) Ooh la la – a little piece of *la belle France* comes to Bath at this quintessentially Gallic bistro near Royal Crescent. Rustic Mediterranean dishes are matched by a thoroughly French ambience, complete with checked tablecloths, clattering pans, sun-baked colours and a streetside terrace.

Firehouse Rotisserie (☎ 482070; 2 John St; mains £11-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Stateside flavours and a Californian vibe characterise this excellent American restaurant, run by a couple of ex-LA chefs. The menu takes its cue from Mexico and the deep South, with signature dishes including rotisserie chicken, Louisiana catfish and Texan steak, as well as huge brick-fired pizzas.

Demuth's (☎ 446059; 2 North Pde Passage; mains £11.50-12.50; 🕒 lunch) This much-admired vegetarian restaurant is renowned for its inventive cooking. The intimate town house dining room is finished with lustrous wood and abstract art, and the mood is buzzy and informal. Cooking courses can be booked at www.vegetariancookeryschool.com.

FishWorks (☎ 448707; 6 Green St; mains from £13; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This wonderful place combines a fishmonger, cookery school and seafood restaurant into one piscatorially perfect bundle. Choose your fish from the ice-packed trays downstairs, or select something fresh from the chalkboard menu, and sit back and enjoy the flavours of the sea.

Onefishtwofish (☎ 330236; 10A North Pde; mains £13-18; 🕒 dinner Tue-Sun) More top-class seafood is on offer at this new restaurant by the weirside, housed in an extraordinary barrel-vaulted cellar built from rough brick and flagstone tiles. The menu changes according to the daily catch; the Marseillaise bouillabaisse offers a true taste of the Côte d'Azur.

Circus (☎ 318918; 34 Brock St; set menu £19.95; 🕒 Tue-Sun) The razor-edge tablecloths and blinding cutlery set the scene at this swish Anglo-French restaurant. It's one of the city's top tables, with a complex menu that mixes Gallic flavours with local produce, and an atmosphere that's starchier than a matron's apron.

Top End

Olive Tree Restaurant (☎ 447928; Russell St; 2-/3-course lunch £14.50/16.50, dinner mains £15-23; 🕒 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sun) If you're after a special supper, look no further than the in-house restaurant at the Queensberry Hotel, which boasts a new Michelin-starred chef and a fresh minimalist look. The cooking is straight from the top drawer and specialises in creative takes on local meat, seafood and game.

Hole in the Wall (☎ 425242; 16 George St; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Back in the '60s, the venerable Hole in the Wall was one of the restaurants that heralded the rebirth of British cuisine, and though it's changed hands many times since then, it's still a beacon for innovative cooking. Fusion flavours and a modern country-tinged interior have given a new lease of life to this old fave.

DRINKING

Common Room (☎ 425550; 2 Saville Row) Next door to an anarchic antiques shop, this tiny little bar is a favourite with Bath's beautiful people. It's got all the designer credentials – exposed brickwork, blonde-wood floors, black-leather sofas – and a more chilled atmosphere than the drinking dens on George St.

Revolution (☎ 336168; George St) Swish and ever-so-slightly snooty Manhattan-style bar, with the standard-issue blend of retro lamps and chrome fixtures, and a selection of cocktails served by the jug.

Sub 13 (☎ 466667; 4 Edgar Bldgs, George St; 🕒 closed Sun) This hip new hang-out has established itself as a smooth-operating alternative to Bath's bigger, brasher joints. Iced beers, bespoke cocktails and an intimate vibe are the order of the day.

Porter (☎ 424104; George St) Bath's only veggie pub is a rustic, spit-and-sawdust affair run by the folk behind Moles nightclub. Regular bands play in the downstairs cellar, and it's usually jammed to the rafters on Friday and Saturday night.

Bath Tap (☎ 404344; 19-20 St James Pde; 🕒 to 2am Thu-Sat) The classic pub hang-out for Bath's gay community, with a late weekend licence and a fun range of theme nights ranging from drag to cabaret.

ENTERTAINMENT

Venue magazine (www.venue.co.uk; £1.20) has comprehensive listings with details of theatre, music, gigs – the works, basically – for Bristol and Bath. Pick up a copy at any newsagent.

Nightclubs

Moles (☎ 404445; www.moles.co.uk; 14 George St; admission £5-7) The best venue in town continues to go from strength to strength, hosting a regular line-up of cutting-edge new acts and breaking bands, as well as occasional club nights. There's also live music in the cellar bar of Porter across the road.

Babylon (☎ 465002; Kingston Rd; admission £3-5; 🕒 Thu-Sat) This is Bath's big night out, at least if you're a student; drum'n'bass, house, funk, breaks and indie all feature on the revolving programme of events, but seasoned clubbers tend to head over to Bristol instead.

Cadillacs (☎ 464241; 90B Walcot St; £4-6) A venerable old club that's been around for donkey's years and is starting to show its age; still, it's worth a look for a late-night drink and the occasional decent night.

Theatre & Cinemas

Theatre Royal (☎ 448844; www.theatreroyal.org.uk; Sawclose) This seriously posh provincial theatre features comedy, drama, opera, ballet and world music in the main auditorium, and more experimental productions at its smaller Ustinov Studio.

Rondo Theatre (☎ 463362; www.rondotheatre.co.uk; St Saviours Rd, Larkhall) This small but adventurous rep theatre mixes professional, amateur and community work in a varied programme of comedy, music, dance and drama.

Little Theatre (☎ 466822; St Michael's Pl) Bath's art-house cinema, screening mostly fringe and foreign-language films.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

National Express coaches run to London (£16.50, 3½ hours, 10 daily) via Heathrow (£16.50, 2¾ hours), and to Bristol (£3.50, 45 minutes, two daily) for buses to the north. Services to most other cities require a change at Bristol or Heathrow.

Buses X39/339 (55 minutes, several per hour) and 332 (50 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday) run to Bristol. Other useful services include buses X4/X5 to Bradford-on-Avon (30 minutes, half-hourly), X71/X72 to Devizes (one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday) and 173/773 to Wells (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday).

Map-timetables for individual routes are available from the **bus station office** (☎ 464446; Manvers St; 🕒 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Train

There are half-hourly trains to London Paddington (£56, 1½ hours) and Cardiff (£12.90, 1¼ hours), and several each hour to Bristol (£5.20, 11 minutes), where you can connect with the main-line trains to northern England.

Trains go to Oxford roughly hourly (£17.20, 1½ hours, change at Didcot Parkway); Weymouth (£11.60, 2¼ hours) every two hours via Bradford-on-Avon (£3, 15 minutes) and Dorchester West (£11.30, two hours); and Portsmouth (£24.10, 2½ hours) hourly via Salisbury (£11.20, one hour).

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Bikes can be hired from **Avon Valley Cycles** (☎ 461880; www.bikeshop.uk.com; Arch 37; half-/full day £10/15; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, till 8pm Thu) near the train station. The 13-mile **Bristol and Bath Railway Path** (www.bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk) runs along the disused track of the old Midland Railway, decommissioned in the late 1960s.

Bus

Bus 18 runs from the bus station, High St and Great Pulteney St up Bathwick Hill past the YHA to the university every 10 minutes. Bus 4 runs every 20 minutes to Bathampton from the same places. A FirstDay Pass for unlimited bus travel in the city costs adult/child £4/2.60.

Car

Bath has a serious traffic problem (especially at rush hour) and an infuriating one-way system. **Park & Ride services** (☎ 464446; return £1.70, 10min to centre, every 10-15min; ⏲ 6.15am-7.30pm) operate at Lansdown to the north, Newbridge to the west and Odd Down to the south.

SOMERSET

For a snapshot of the classic English countryside, you can't do much better than Somerset, where life still seems to move at its own decidedly low-key pace. With its hotchpotch landscape of quiet villages, ivy-covered pubs and broad fields, it makes the perfect place for some good old-fashioned rural R&R, and is often much quieter than the better-known holiday regions of Devon and Cornwall further to the west. Highlights include the beautiful cathedral city of Wells, the caves of Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge and the excellent walking country around Exmoor National Park.

Orientation & Information

Somerset nestles around the crook in the elbow of the Bristol Channel. The Mendip Hills (the Mendips) follow a line below Bristol, just north of Wells and Cheddar, while the Quantock Hills (the Quantocks) sit just east of Exmoor. Most places of interest are in northern Somerset. Bath or Wells make good bases to the east, as do Lynton and Lynmouth to the west.

Most towns have tourist offices and there's a central **Somerset Visitor Centre** (☎ 01934-750833; somersetvisitorcentre@somerset.gov.uk; Sedgemoor Services M5 South, Axbridge) for general information. The new website at www.somerset.net is a useful source of online info.

Getting Around

Most buses in Somerset are operated by **First** (☎ 0845 606 4446; www.firstgroup.com), supplemented by a few smaller operators and coach companies. For timetables and general travel information, visit the First website, contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) or contact **Somerset County Council's transport department** (☎ 0845 345 9155; transport@somerset.gov.uk). Area timetables are available at bus stations and tourist offices.

WELLS

☎ 01749 / pop 10,406

Tiny Wells is England's smallest city, and only qualifies for the title of 'city' thanks to its magnificent medieval cathedral, which sits in the heart of town beside the grand Bishop's Palace – the main seat of ecclesiastical power in this part of Britain since the 12th century, and still the official residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Medieval buildings and cobbled streets radiate out from the cathedral green to the main marketplace, which has been the bustling heart of Wells for some nine centuries. These days Wells is a quiet provincial city, with some good restaurants and busy shops, and makes a good launch pad for exploring the Mendips and northern Somerset.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 672552; www.wells.gov.uk; Market Pl; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) stocks the *Wells City Trail* leaflet (30p) and sells discount tickets to the nearby attractions of Wookey Hole, Cheddar Gorge and Longleat. Wednesday and Saturday are market days.

Wells Laundrette (☎ 01458 830409; 39 St Cuthbert St; ⏲ 8am-8pm) is opposite St Cuthbert's Church.

Sights

WELLS CATHEDRAL

The **Cathedral Church of St Andrew** (☎ 674483; www.wellscathedral.org.uk; Chain Gate, Cathedral Green; requested donation adult/child £5/2; ⏲ 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7am-6pm Oct-Mar) was built in stages between 1180 and 1508. The building's most famous asset is the wonderful **west front**, an immense sculpture gallery decorated with over 300 figures, built in the 13th century and restored to its original splendour in 1986. The façade would once have been painted in vivid colours; apart from the figure of Christ, installed in 1985 in the uppermost niche, all the figures are original.

Inside, the most striking feature is the pair of **scissor arches** separating the nave from the choir, designed to counter the subsidence of the central tower. High up in the north transept is a wonderful **mechanical clock** dating from 1392 – the second-oldest in England after the one in Salisbury Cathedral – which shows the position of the planets and the phases of the moon.

Other highlights are the elegant **lady chapel** (1326) at the eastern end and the seven **effigies** of Anglo-Saxon bishops ringing the choir. The 15th-century **chained library** houses books and manuscripts dating back to 1472. It's only open at certain times during the year or by prior arrangement.

From the north transept follow the worn steps to the glorious **Chapter House** (1306), with its delicate ceiling ribs sprouting like a palm from a central column. Externally, look out for the **Chain Bridge** built from the northern side of the cathedral to Vicars' Close to enable clerics to reach the cathedral without getting their robes wet. The **cloisters** on the southern side surround a pretty courtyard.

Guided tours (⏲ Mon-Sat) of the cathedral are free.

CATHEDRAL CLOSE

Wells Cathedral forms the centrepiece of a cluster of ecclesiastical buildings dating back to the Middle Ages and beyond. Facing the west front are the 15th-century **Old Deanery** and the **Wells Museum** (☎ 673477; 8 Cathedral Green; www.wellsmuseum.org.uk; admission £3; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter), with exhibits on local life, cathedral architecture and the infamous Witch of Wookey Hole.

Further along on the left, **Vicars' Close** is a stunning cobbled street of 14th-century houses with a chapel at the far end, thought to be the oldest complete medieval street in Europe.

Penniless Porch, a corner gate leading onto Market Sq and built by Bishop Bekynton around 1450, is so-called because beggars asked for alms here.

BISHOP'S PALACE

Beyond the cathedral is the moated 13th-century **Bishop's Palace** (☎ 678691; www.bishopspalacewells.co.uk; adult/child £5/1; ⏲ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Oct), purportedly the oldest inhabited building in England. Surrounded by a huge fortified wall, the palace complex contains several fine Italian Gothic state rooms, an imposing Great Hall and beautiful tree-shaded gardens. The natural wells that gave the city its name bubble up in the palace's grounds, feeding the moat and the fountain in the market square. The swans in the moat have been trained to ring a bell outside one of the windows when they want to be fed.

Sleeping

Infield House (☎ 670989; www.infieldhouse.co.uk; 36 Portway; s/d £28/54; Ⓟ ☒) The best (and cheapest) of several B&Bs scattered along the busy Portway road, offering simple, spacious rooms in a Victorian town house. There are no real surprises, but the buffet breakfast is generous and the town centre is a short walk away.

Beryl (☎ 678738; www.beryl-wells.co.uk; Hawkers Lane; s £60-75, d £75-115; Ⓟ ☒ ♿) A mile from the city centre, this stately gabled Victorian mansion on 13 acres of private parkland boasts the kind of luxurious accommodation you'd normally find at double (or triple) the price. The richly furnished rooms have bags of country character, with swags, frills and elegant drapes and a smattering of veneered antiques. The heated outdoor swimming pool is the icing on the cake.

Ancient Gate House Hotel (☎ 672029; www.ancientgatehouse.co.uk; Browne's Gate; s £76, d £91-97.50; ☒) You can't get much more central than this 15th-century inn, which actually forms part of the Great West Gate of Cathedral Close. The wood beams, wonky walls and slightly musty atmosphere have been faithfully preserved, and there are a couple of rooms with carved wooden four-poster and half-tester beds.

Also recommended:

Old Farmhouse (☎ 675058; www.plus44.com/oldfarmhouse; r from £60; Ⓟ ☒) Fine 17th-century farmhouse with its own walled garden and comfy if unspectacular rooms.

Swan Hotel (☎ 836300; www.bhere.co.uk; Sadler St; d from £90; ☒) Elegant 15th-century coaching room with large period-themed rooms.

Eating

Café Romna (☎ 670240; 13 Sadler St; mains £10-15; ⏲ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A stylish Bangladeshi fusion restaurant, decked out with hot colours,

WORTH THE TRIP

Glencot House (☎ 677160; www.glencothouse.co.uk; Wookey Hole; s/d £74/97, 4-poster-bed rooms £130; 🅿 🚭) If you're after the ultimate country getaway, look no further than this breathtaking 19th-century manor house, built in opulent Jacobean style and surrounded by 18 acres of private woods and riverside grounds (as well as its own cricket pitch). Walnut panelling, carved ceilings and dazzling chandeliers decorate the public rooms, and there are 13 graceful rooms spread out around the house's meandering corridors, all individually finished with a selection of chaise longues, country prints and antique dressers. Downstairs there's a well-stocked library, a firelit drawing room, and a wood-beamed dining hall that could have fallen straight from the pages of *The Remains of the Day*.

low lighting and black banquette sofas, and an intriguing menu of unusual dishes such as *zingha bhajee* (Bangladeshi vegetable curry) and *chingri palack* (tiger prawns cooked with garlic and spinach).

Goodfellows (☎ 673866; 5 Sadler St; mains £13-22, set menu £29; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tues-Sat) This sophisticated restaurant has scooped several awards for its creative blend of Somerset produce and French-inspired cuisine. During the day it's a relaxed café-cum–artisan baker, with designer sandwiches, crumbly pastries and traditional breads, as well as a selection of fresh fish; for something more complex head for the formal dining room, where you'll find classy multi-course menus for lunch and dinner.

Rugantino (☎ 672029; Browne's Gate; 3-course menu £18.90; 🕑 dinner) Practically every Italian dish you could possibly think of is served up at this rustic restaurant, situated on the ground floor of the Ancient Gate House Hotel. All the pasta and pizza classics are present and correct, as well as more esoteric fare such as bread-crumbed pork and chicken in pancetta.

Getting There & Around

National Express runs direct to London once a day (£18, 4½ hours), although it's usually more convenient to travel to Bristol and catch a local bus.

Bus 173 runs from Bath (one hour 20 minutes, hourly, seven on Sunday). Bus 375/376 travels to Wells from Bristol (one hour, hourly) before continuing on to Glastonbury (15 minutes) and Street (25 minutes). Bus 29 travels to Taunton (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends) via Glastonbury. Bus 126 runs to Cheddar (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday. There's no train station in Wells.

Bike City (☎ 671711; 31 Broad St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) charges £15 per day for bike hire.

AROUND WELLS

Wookey Hole

On the southern edge of the Mendips, the River Axe has carved out a series of deep caverns collectively known as **Wookey Hole** (☎ 01749-672243; www.wookey.co.uk; adult/child £10.90/8.50; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Mar). The caves are littered with dramatic natural features, including a subterranean lake and some fascinating stalagmites and stalactites (one of which is supposedly the legendary Witch of Wookey Hole, who was turned to stone by a local priest). The deepest subterranean dive ever recorded in Britain was made here in September 2004, when divers reached a depth of more than 149ft. Admission to the caves is by guided tour.

The rest of the complex is taken up by a motley assortment of plastic dinosaurs, mirror mazes and an Edwardian penny arcade, as well as a working paper mill. There are a few prehistoric finds displayed at the onsite museum, but most are on display at the Wells Museum.

Bus 670 runs from Wells (10 minutes, nine daily, four on Sunday).

Cheddar Gorge

☎ 01934

If Wookey Hole is a little too touristy for your tastes, then you'd better be prepared for **Cheddar Caves** (☎ 742343; www.cheddarcaves.co.uk; Explorer Ticket adult/child £11.50/8.50; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sep-Jun), a spectacular series of limestone caverns that's always jammed throughout the summer. Only a few caves are open to the public; the most impressive are Cox's Cave and Gough's Cave, both decorated by stalactites and stalagmites, and subtly lit to bring out the spectrum of colours in the limestone rock. After the end of the last Ice Age, the caves were inhabited by prehistoric people; a 9000-year-old skeleton (the 'Cheddar Man') was discovered here in 1903, and genetic tests have revealed that some of his descendants are still living in the surrounding area.

Outside the caves, the 274 steps of **Jacob's Ladder** lead up to an impressive panorama of the surrounding countryside; on a clear day you can see all the way to Glastonbury Tor and Exmoor. A signposted 3-mile-circuit walk follows the cliffs along the most spectacular parts of **Cheddar Gorge**.

The **tourist office** (☎ 744071; cheddar.tic@sedgemoor.gov.uk; 🕑 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Oct, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Easter) is at the southern end of the gorge and has some useful information on local walks and caving trips.

Bus 126 runs to Wells (25 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday and every two hours on Sunday.

GLASTONBURY

☎ 01458 / pop 8429

If you suddenly feel the need to get your third eye cleansed or your chakras realigned, then head for good old Glastonbury, a bohemian haven and centre for New Age culture since the days of the Summer of Love, and still a favourite hang-out for hippies, mystics and counter-cultural types. The main street is thronged with an assortment of crystal-sellers, veggie cafés, mystical bookshops and bong emporiums, but Glastonbury has been a spiritual centre since long before the weekend Buddhists and white witches arrived. It's supposedly the birthplace of Christianity in England, and several of Britain's most important ley lines are said to converge on nearby Glastonbury Tor. Whether you find spiritual enlightenment or just a solid veggie meal in Glastonbury, one thing's for certain: it's not a bad place to stock up on joss sticks.

Information

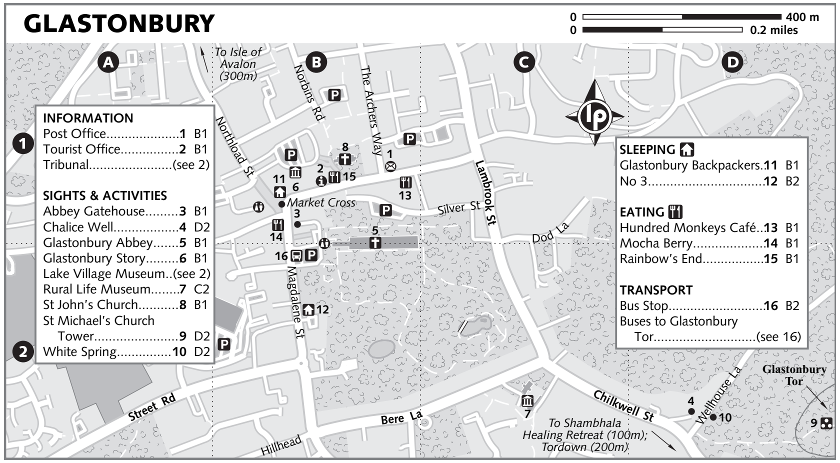
Glastonbury's **tourist office** (☎ 832954; www.glastonburytic.co.uk; The Tribunal, 9 High St; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) stocks free maps and accommodation lists, and sells leaflets describing local walks and the *Glastonbury Millennium Trail* (60p).

Sights

GLASTONBURY ABBEY

Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea, great-uncle of Jesus, owned mines in this area and returned here with the Holy Grail after the death of Christ. Joseph supposedly founded England's first church on the site of the ruined **abbey** (☎ 832267; www.glastonburyabbey.com; Magdalene St; admission £4; 🕑 9.30am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-6pm Apr, May & Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mar & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov, 10am-4.30pm Dec & Jan, 10am-5pm Feb), but the earliest proven Christian connection dates from the 7th century, when King Ine gave a charter to a monastery in Glastonbury. In 1184 the church was destroyed by fire and reconstruction began in the reign of Henry II.

The remaining ruins at Glastonbury mainly date from the church built after the 1184 fire. It's still possible to make out some of the nave walls, the ruins of the St Mary's chapel, and the remains of the crossing arches, which may have been scissor-shaped like those in Wells Cathedral. The site of the supposed tomb of



King Arthur and his wife, Queen Guinevere, is marked in the grass. The grounds also contain a small museum, cider orchard and herb garden, as well as the **Holy Thorn** tree, which supposedly sprung from Joseph's staff and blooms twice a year, at Christmas and Easter.

GLASTONBURY TOR

There are all kinds of myths swirling around the grassy mound of Glastonbury Tor, a 160m-high hill just outside town that commands glorious views over the surrounding countryside. According to some it's the home of a Faery King, while an old Celtic legend identifies it as the stronghold of Gwyn ap Nudd, King of the Underworld; but the most famous legend identifies the tor as the mythic Isle Of Avalon, where King Arthur was taken after being mortally wounded in battle by his nephew Mordred, and where Britain's 'once and future king' sleeps until his country calls again.

Whatever the truth of the legends, the tor has been a site of pilgrimage for many years, and was once topped by the medieval church of St Michael; today only the tower remains. On the way up look out for **Gog** and **Magog**, two gnarled oak trees believed to be the last remains of an ancient processional avenue.

It takes 45 minutes to walk up and down the tor. Parking is not permitted nearby, so take the Tor Bus (£1) from Dunstan's car park near the abbey. The bus runs to the tor and back every 30 minutes from 10am to 7.30pm April to September, and from 10am to 3.30pm from October to April. It also stops at Chalice Well and the Rural Life Museum.

CHALICE WELL & GARDENS

Shaded by knotted yew trees and surrounded by peaceful paths, the **Chalice Well & Gardens** (☎ 831154; www.chalicewell.org.uk; admission £3; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) has been a site of pilgrimage since the days of the Celts. The iron-red waters from the 800-year-old well are rumoured to have healing properties, good for everything from eczema to smelly feet; some legends also identify the well as the hiding place of the Holy Grail. You can drink the water from a lion's-head spout, or rest your feet in basins surrounded by flowers.

The Chalice Well is also known as the 'Red Spring' or 'Blood Spring'; its sister, **White Spring**, surfaces across Wellhouse Lane. Spigots from both springs empty into the street, where there's often a queue to fill containers.

RURAL LIFE MUSEUM

Somerset's agricultural heritage is explored at the **Rural Life Museum** (☎ 831197; Abbey Farm, Chilkwell St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), which contains a varied collection of artefacts relating to traditional trades such as willow growing, peat-digging, cider-making and cheese-making.

GLASTONBURY STORY

The tale of King Arthur's grave and many other Glastonbury legends is explored at the **Glastonbury Story** (☎ 831666; www.glastonburystory.org.uk; St John's Sq; admission £3; 🕑 11am-5pm late Mar-Oct). It's a little low-budget, but the exhibition is a decent introduction to the various legends that swirl around the town and its famous tor.

LAKE VILLAGE MUSEUM

Upstairs from Glastonbury's tourist office, in the medieval courthouse, the **Lake Village Museum** (EH; The Tribunal, 9 High St; admission £2) displays finds from a prehistoric bog village discovered nearby.

Tours

There are lots of companies offering guided tours of Glastonbury's main sights.

Based at the Gothic Image bookshop on High St, **Mystical Tours of Glastonbury** (☎ 831453; www.gothicimagetours.co.uk; 7 High St; per person £60) offers guided tours to the Wearyall Hill, Gog and Magog and Glastonbury Tor itself, as well as day tours to Stonehenge and Avebury.

Goddess Tours (☎ 275084; kathy.jones@ukonline.co.uk) has guided tours run by the mystical Priestesses of Avalon, who are members of the matriarchal 'Goddess' religious order.

Secret Landscape Tours (☎ 07854-316754; www.secretlandscapetours.com) offers guided trips to sacred sites throughout the southwest, including to Glastonbury Tor and Stonehenge.

Sleeping

If you're a fan of wind chimes, organic brekkies and homemade muesli, Glastonbury's B&Bs won't disappoint.

Glastonbury Backpackers (☎ 833353; www.glastonburybackpackers.com; 4 Market Pl; dm/tw/d £14/35/40; 🅿 💻) Glastonbury's only hostel is a really friendly, welcoming affair, decked out in jazzy colours with some lovely double rooms and small dorms, as well as a TV lounge and kitchen. You can get online and grab a sandwich at the café-bar downstairs.

THE OTHER GLASTONBURY

To many people, the village of Glastonbury is practically synonymous with the **Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts** (www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk), an annual extravaganza of music, street theatre, dance, cabaret, carnival, ecology, spirituality and general all-round weirdness that's been held on and off on Piltdown Farm, near Glastonbury, for the last 30 years. The first event was held in 1970, when the young dairy farmer Michael Eavis invited some bands to play on makeshift stages in his field; more than 30 years later, the festival has become the longest-running performing arts festival in the world, attracting some of the world's biggest acts and an annual crowd of more than 120,000 festival-goers. Glastonbury is more a way of life than a music festival, and it's a rite of passage for every self-respecting British teenager; it's also the subject of a new feature-length documentary by film-maker Julian Temple.

Tordown (☎ 832287; www.tordown.com; 5 Ashwell Lane; s £28, d £54-62; 🅿 ⊠) This red-brick town house is half ecofriendly B&B, half religious retreat. If all you're after is a peaceful sleep and a massive veggie breakfast, then all well and good; for the more enlightened there are courses ranging from cellular healing to 'higher self sessions' and Egyptian ear coning.

Shambhala Healing Retreat (☎ 831797; www.shambhala.co.uk; Coursing Batch, s/d £36/92) Another spiritual sanctuary offering several 'clear energy' rooms furnished in a choice of Tibetan and Egyptian themes, and a meditation tent on the top floor. Reiki massage, DNA activation and colonic hydrotherapy are all on offer; you can even meet your guardian angel.

Number 3 (☎ 832129; www.numberthree.co.uk; 3 Magdalene St; s £75-85, d £100-110; 🅿 ⊠) This luxurious Georgian-style B&B is the poshest place to stay in Glastonbury, with five classy bedrooms all named after English trees, overlooking a beautiful walled garden filled with silver birch and weeping willow trees.

Eating

Rainbow's End (☎ 833896; 17A High St; mains £4-7; 🕑 10am-4pm) The classic Glastonbury wholefood café, with a down-to-earth dining room plastered with potted plants and wooden tables, and a rotating menu of organic meals including veggie moussaka, sweet potato flan and fiery chilli. Needless to say, the carrot cake is divine.

Hundred Monkeys Café (☎ 833386; 52 High St; mains £4-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This smart café is a welcome alternative to Glastonbury's more rustic eateries, with a light dining area filled with leather sofas, pine tables and complimentary newspapers, and a huge blackboard of fresh pastas, salads, baguettes and mains.

Mocha Berry (☎ 832149; 14 Market Pl; mains £5-8; 🕑 Sun-Wed) This ever-popular café is the top spot in Glastonbury for a frothy latte, a fresh milkshake or a stack of breakfast pancakes.

Getting There & Away

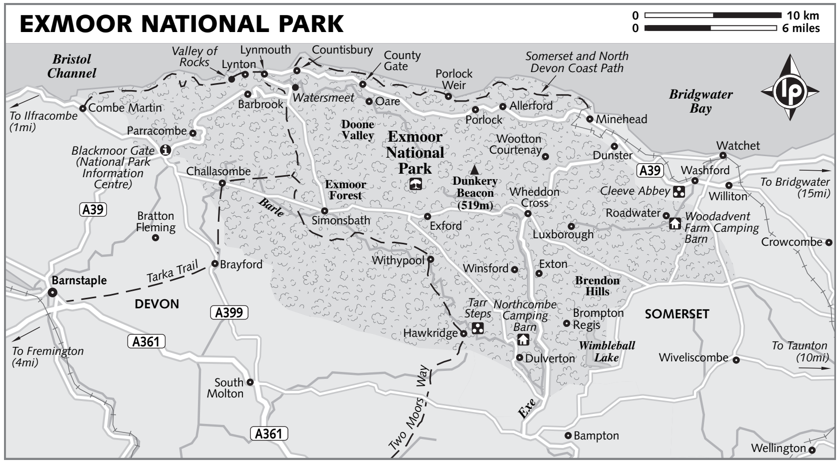
There's one early-morning National Express service to Bath (£5.70, 1¼ hours) and on to London (£18, 4¼ hours).

Bus 29 travels to Glastonbury from Taunton (90 minutes, seven daily Monday to Friday, five or six on weekends). Bus 375/376 travels to Wells (30 minutes, half-hourly, hourly on Sunday) and Bristol (1¼ hours), and to Street (15 minutes), Yeovil (30 minutes) and Bridgwater (one hour) in the opposite direction. There is no train station.

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Running along the northwestern coastline of Somerset into Devon, this tiny national park is a hiker's haven and a twitcher's dream come true. With its idyllic landscape of emerald-green meadows, wooded combes and crumbling cliffs, Exmoor is a more pastoral place than its sister national park on the opposite coast, Dartmoor. It's also home to some of Britain's oldest agricultural land; some of its farms date back to the Domesday Book and beyond, and ancient herds of horned sheep, Exmoor ponies and wild red deer roam its fields and bridleways.

Most of the park's main towns are dotted along the coastline, which stretches from the coastal resorts of Lynton and Lynmouth in the far west, along to the pretty harbour of Porlock and the medieval town of Dunster, with its brooding red-brick castle, all the way to the family-fun resort of Minehead in the east. Inland, Exmoor is dotted with small


EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK
0 10 km
0 6 miles
Bristol Channel
Valley of Rocks
Lynton
Lynmouth
Countisbury
County Gate
Porlock Weir
Somerset and North Devon Coast Path
Bridgwater Bay
To Ilfracombe (1mi)
Combe Martin
Barbrook
Watersmeet
Oare
Allerford
Porlock
Minehead
Parracombe
Doone Valley
Exmoor National Park
Wootton Courtenay
Watchet
Blackmoor Gate (National Park Information Centre)
Dunster
Challacombe
Exmoor Forest
Dunkery Beacon (519m)
Wheddon Cross
A39
Washford
Cleeve Abbey
Williton
To Bridgwater (15mi)
A39
Bratton Fleming
Barle
Simonsbath
Exford
Roadwater
Woodadvent Farm Camping Barn
Luxborough
Crowcombe
Tarka Trail
Brayford
Withypool
Winsford
Exton
Barnstaple
DEVON
Brendon Hills
A399
Tarr Steps
Northcombe Camping Barn
Brompton Regis
SOMERSET
Hawkridge
A361
To Fremington (4mi)
Dulverton
Wimbleball Lake
Wiveliscombe
To Taunton (10mi)
South Molton
Two Moors Way
Exe
A361
Bampton
Wellington

hamlets and sleepy villages that make ideal getaways from the coastal crowds.

Orientation

The park is only about 21 miles wide from west to east and just 12 miles from north to south. Waymarked paths crisscross the park and a dramatic section of the South West Coast Path runs from Minehead, just outside the park, to Padstow in Cornwall.

Information

There are five **National Park Authority (NPA) visitor centres** (🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, limited hours Nov-Easter):

Blackmoor Gate (☎ 01598-763466; NPCBlackmoorGate@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)
Combe Martin (☎ 01271-883319; NPCCombeMartin@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Cross St)
County Gate (☎ 01598-741321; NPCCountyGate@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; A39 Countisbury)
Dulverton (☎ 01398-323841; NPCDulverton@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St)
Dunster (☎ 01643-821835; NPCDunster@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Dunster Steep)

The **Exmoor NPA Administrative Offices** (☎ 01398-323665; www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; Exmoor House, Dulverton) is a good point of contact for general information before you arrive. It also publishes the free *Exmoor Visitor* newspaper, which contains accommodation lists, timetables of organised activities and a handy map.

There are four comprehensive websites covering Exmoor:

Exmoor National Park (www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk) The official NPA site.
Exmoor Tourist Association (www.exmoor.com) Lists details on accommodation and activities.
Visit Exmoor (www.visit-exmoor.info) Excellent information site with advice on activities, events, accommodation and eating out.
What's On Exmoor (www.whatsonexmoor.com) Local listings and information.

Activities

ADVENTURE SPORTS

You can sail, surf and kayak at **Wimbleball Lake Watersports Centre** (☎ 01398-371460), while **Exmoor Adventure** (☎ 01271-830628; www.exmooradventure.co.uk) can arrange rock climbing and abseiling.

CYCLING

The network of bridleways and quiet lanes makes Exmoor great cycling country, but you're not going to get away without tackling a few hills. Popular trails travel through the Brendon Hills, the Crown Estate woodland and along the old Barnstaple railway line. Several sections of the National Cycle Network (NCN) cross the park, including the **West Country Way** (NCN Rte 3) from Bristol to Padstow, and the **Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route** (NCN Rte 27) between Exmoor and Dartmoor.

MOORLAND SAFARIS

Several companies offer 4WD 'safari' trips across the moor. If you're a nature lover or a keen photographer, bird-watching and deer-watching safaris can be arranged. Half-day trips start at around £20.

Barle Valley Safaris (☎ 01643-851386; www.exmoor-barlevalley-safaris.co.uk; Dulverton & Minehead)
Discovery Safaris (☎ 01643-863080; www.discoverysafaris.com; Porlock)
Exmoor Safari (☎ 01643-831229; www.exmoorsafari.co.uk; Exford)

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

Exmoor is popular riding country. There are lots of stables offering pony and horse treks for around £15 per hour – see the *Exmoor Visitor* for full details.

Brendon Manor Riding Stables (☎ 01598-741246; nr Lynton)
Burrowhayes Farm (☎ 01643-862463; www.burrowhayes.co.uk; Porlock)
Outovercott Stables (☎ 01598-753341; www.outovercott.co.uk; Lynton)

WALKING

The best-known hiking routes on Exmoor are the **Somerset and North Devon Coast Path** (part of the South West Coast Path) and the Exmoor section of the **Two Moors Way**, which starts in Lynmouth and travels south to Dartmoor.

Part of the 180-mile **Tarka Trail** (based on the countryside that inspired Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*) is in the park. Join it in Combe Martin and walk to Lynton/Lynmouth, then inland to Brayford and Barnstaple.

The **Coleridge Way** winds for 36 miles through Exmoor, the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks, taking in Coleridge's home at Nether Stowey and the village of Porlock.

Organised walks run by the NPA are held throughout the year – contact one of the NPA centres, visit www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk, or see the listings in the *Exmoor Visitor* for details. Short walks cost £3, longer walks £5.

Sleeping & Eating

There are YHA hostels in Minehead and Ilfracombe (outside the park), and Lynton and Exford in the park. There are organised camping grounds along the coast and **camping barns** (☎ bookings 01200-420102; per person £6) at Woodadvent Farm near Roadwater and Northcombe, a mile from Dulverton.

There's no shortage of B&Bs and hotels in the park, and plenty of places to eat. If you'd like to hire a cottage, **Exmoor Holiday Group** (www.exmoor-holidays.co.uk) is a good bet.

Getting There & Around

Getting around Exmoor by bus is tricky – there are only a couple of regular routes, and practically none to the west side of the park.

BICYCLE

Several places around the park hire mountain bikes.

Fremington Quay (☎ 01271-372586; www.biketrail.co.uk; Fremington; per day £6.50-24) Delivers bikes to your door.
Tarka Trail (☎ 01271-324202; Train Station, Barnstaple; per day £7-10)

BUS

National Express runs from London to Barnstaple (£27.50, 5½ hours, four daily) and Ilfracombe (£27.50, 6½ hours, two daily), and from Bristol to Barnstaple (£17.80, three hours, one daily).

The *Taunton & West Somerset Public Transport Guide*, free from tourist offices, contains timetables for all the main bus routes.

DULVERTON

☎ 01398

The southern gateway to Exmoor is Dulverton, at the confluence of the region's two main rivers, the Exe and Barle. It's a solid, no-nonsense sort of country town, home to a collection of gun sellers, fishing-tackle stores, clothing boutiques and gift shops, as well as the main **NPA Visitor Centre** (☎ 01398-323841; dulvertonvc@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk; 7-9 Fore St; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct).

Walking

There's a stunning 12-mile circular walk along the river from Dulverton to Tarr Steps – an ancient stone clapper bridge haphazardly placed across the River Barle and shaded by gnarled old trees. The bridge was supposedly built by the devil for sunbathing. It's a four- to five-hour trek; you can add another three or four hours by continuing from Tarr Steps up Winsford Hill for distant views over Devon.

Sleeping & Eating

Tarr Farm (☎ 01643-851507; www.tarrfarm.co.uk; s/d £65/130; 🅿 🚭) This old Exmoor farm near Tarn Steps, 7 miles from Dulverton, contains several bedrooms finished in a surprisingly contemporary style, all topped off with thoughtful extras such as private fridges and homemade cookies. The excellent restaurant specialises in local flavours – think Exmoor lamb, Devon beef and ham hock with piccalilli.

Town Mills (☎ 323124; www.townmillsdulverton.co.uk; High St; s incl breakfast £32-46, d incl breakfast £54-60; ☒) For something more central, try this old whitewashed millhouse in the middle of Dulverton, with five snug rooms brimming over with flowery furnishings and puffy duvets, as well as the occasional original fireplace. Breakfast in bed comes as standard.

Lewis' Tea Rooms (☎ 323850; 13 High St; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) Pastel prints, ticking clocks and pine floors characterise the sunny dining room of this tiny restaurant and tearoom, where you can tuck into a hearty ploughman's lunch, followed by homemade scones for tea and an upmarket country menu by night.

Also recommended:

Northcombe Camping Barn (☎ 01200-420102; per person £6) A converted watermill about 1 mile from town.

Springfield Farm (☎ 323722; www.springfieldfarms.co.uk; Ashwick Lane; s £30, d £55-57; 🅿 ☒) Traditional Exmoor farmhouse offering basic, good-value rooms.

Getting There & Away

Bus 398 stops at Dulverton six times daily on its way from Minehead (50 minutes) and Dunster (40 minutes) to Tiverton.

LYNTON & LYNMOUTH

☎ 01598

The attractive harbour of Lynmouth is rooted at the base of a steep, tree-lined valley, where the West Lyn River empties into the sea along Exmoor's northern coastline. Like Boscastle, Lynmouth is famous as the location of a devastating flash flood that swept through the village in 1952. Sadly, Lynmouth paid a much heavier price than its Cornish cousin; 34 people lost their lives in the flood, and memory of the disaster remains strong in the village to this day.

These days Lynmouth is a busy tourist harbour town lined with pleasant pubs, souvenir sellers and fudge shops. Up on the rocky cliffs above the harbour is the more genteel Victorian resort of Lynton, which can be reached via an amazing water-operated railway or an arduous climb up the clifftop path.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0845 660 3232; info@lyntourism.co.uk; Lynton Town Hall, Lee Rd; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) provides the **Lynton & Lynmouth Scene** (www.lyntonandlynmouthscene.co.uk), which is a free newspaper with accommodation, eating and activities listings.

There's a small **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 752509; The Esplanade; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-9pm Jul & Aug) near Lynmouth harbour.

Sights

The history of the flood is explored at the **Lyn & Exmoor Museum** (☎ 752317; St Vincent's Cottage, Market St, Lynton; adult/child £1/20p; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sun), which also houses some interesting archaeological finds and a collection of tools, paintings and period photos.

The **Cliff Railway** (☎ 753486; www.cliffrailwaylynton.co.uk; single/return £1.75/2.75; 🕒 8.45am-7pm Easter-Nov) is an amazing piece of Victorian engineering designed by George Marks, believed to be a pupil of Brunel. Two cars linked by a steel cable descend or ascend the slope according to the amount of water in their tanks. It's been running like clockwork since 1890, and it's still the best way to commute between the two villages. The views aren't bad either.

From the Lynmouth crossroads follow signs 200m to **Glen Lyn Gorge** (☎ 753207; adult/child £4/3; 🕒 Easter-Oct), the steepest of the two valleys into Lynmouth. There are several lovely gorge walks and a small **exhibition centre** devoted to hydroelectric power.

Walking

The most popular local walk is to the dramatic **Valley of the Rocks**, a mile west of Lynton. There are also trails to the lighthouse at **Foreland Point** east of Lynmouth, and to **Watersmeet**, 2 miles upriver from Lynmouth, where there's a handily placed National Trust teashop housed in a Victorian fishing lodge. Lynmouth is also the official starting point of the Two Moors Way.

Sleeping

There are plenty of mid-price B&Bs dotted along Lee Rd in Lynton.

Lynton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5942; www.yha.org.uk; Lynbridge; dm £12; 🅿 ☒) A decent walkers' lodge in a large Victorian house, about a 500m steep walk uphill from town. The accommodation is a little cramped, but there are three square meals served up daily, and hikers' picnics are available too.

Sea View Villa (☎ 753460; www.seaviewvilla.co.uk; 6 Summer House Path; s £40, d £50-90; ☒) Down by the harbour, this 18th-century Georgian villa is worth splashing out on if you're into some seaside pampering. Indian silk fabrics, shag-pile carpets and designer stripes characterise the super-swanky rooms, all finished in coordinated shades of 'champagne', 'ginger' and 'vanilla'.

St Vincent Lodge (☎ 752244; www.st-vincent-hotel.co.uk; Castle Hill; d £65; 🅿 ☒) Run by an Anglo-Belgian couple, this elegant guesthouse once belonged to a comrade of Nelson's, and all the delightful, pared-back rooms are named after battleships from Horatio's fleet. But the real treat is the downstairs restaurant, where Belgian dishes meet Mediterranean spice and Exmoor game.

Victoria Lodge (☎ 753203; www.victorialodge.co.uk; Lee Rd; r £60-90; ☒) This ostentatious gem is the pick of the places along Lee Rd, and boasts a bevy of truly over-the-top bedrooms, all stuffed with heritage fabrics, burnished furniture and poshly pelmeted beds, and each aptly named after a royal princess.

Eating

Eat Moor (☎ 752424; 3 Watersmeet Rd, Lynmouth; mains from £8) This fresh, fiery new restaurant specialises in traditional dishes with a pan-global twist, so it's equally as good for roast local lamb as for Moroccan tagine or authentic Spanish tapas.

Mad Hatters Bistro (☎ 753614; Church Steps, Lynton; mains £12-17; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) A reliable bistro with a strong focus on local produce, serving mainly modern British and Mediterranean-influenced cuisine in a quirky cellar dining room, just off the main road through Lynton.

Getting There & Away

Bus 39/300 runs from Lynmouth to Minehead (70 minutes) via Porlock (50 minutes) four times daily Monday to Saturday.

The most scenic route to Porlock is the steep, twisting road that hugs the coast all the way from Lynmouth. The stunning scenery is worth the £2 toll, and you get to avoid the notoriously steep descent via Porlock Hill.

PORLOCK & AROUND

☎ 01643

The small village of Porlock is one of the prettiest on the north Exmoor coast, with a huddle of thatched cottages running along its main street to the picturesque breakwater of Porlock Weir, 2 miles to the west. Coleridge's famous poem *Kubla Khan* was written during a brief sojourn in Porlock (helped along by a healthy slug of laudanum and a vicious head cold), and the village is still a popular stop-off for summertime tourists, as well as walkers on the Coleridge Way and the South West Coast Path.

The village of **Selworthy**, 2.5 miles east of Porlock, forms part of the 12,500-acre Holnicote Estate, the largest NT-owned area of land on Exmoor. Though its cob-and-thatch cottages look ancient, the village was almost entirely rebuilt in the 19th century by the local philanthropist and landowner Thomas Acland.

Porlock's **visitor centre** (☎ 863150; www.porlock.co.uk; West End, High St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Mar-Nov; 10.30am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar) is the main point of contact for information on the Coleridge Way.

The tiny **Dovery Manor Museum** (High St; admission free; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Sat May-Oct) is housed in a pretty, 15th-century building, and exhibits artefacts and interesting photos of the village.

Sleeping & Eating

Rose Bank Guesthouse (☎ 862728; www.rosebankguesthouse.co.uk; High St; s £30, d £50-60; ☒ 💻) This grand half-timbered house stands right in the centre of the village. The plainly furnished rooms are nothing to write home about, but it's good value and in a handy location for the village pubs.

Ship Inn (☎ 862507; www.shipinnporlock.co.uk; High St; s/d £30/70; 🅿) If history's your thing, then head straight for this 13th-century thatched inn, once a haven for local smugglers and a favoured haunt of Coleridge and his chum Robert Southey. Wicker, pine and cream characterises the 10 plain upstairs rooms, and the hugger-mugger bar is an excellent spot for a Devon stew and a pint of local ale.

Porlock Vale House (☎ 862338; www.porlockvale.co.uk; West Porlock; s/d from £70/110; 🅿 ☒) This ravishing Edwardian manor house is a real treat, mixing grand period features (oak panelling, log fires, Persian rugs and mounted stags' horns) with a refreshingly unstuffy atmosphere. The rooms are a little flouncy, with flowery pelmets and bedspreads to match, but they're cushy and comfortable nonetheless.

Andrew's on the Weir (☎ 863300; www.andrewsontheweir.co.uk; Porlock Weir; d £100-180; 2-/3-course menu £31.50/38.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Every meal becomes an 'experience' at this outlandishly fine restaurant-with-rooms, hovering beside the lapping waves on Porlock Weir. The cuisine is classic British with a *soupçon* of Gallic panache, and the tablecloths are sharp enough to cut your finger on.

Getting There & Away

Bus 39/300 runs from Lynmouth to Porlock (50 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday) and on to Minehead.

DUNSTER

☎ 01643

Dominated by a striking russet-red castle and centred around a cobbled market square, the village of Dunster is an undeniably attractive place and also boasts some unusual architectural features, including a medieval packhorse bridge, a 16th-century stone dovecote and a curious octagonal yarn market. Unfortunately, it's also a favourite on the coach-tour trail, and in high summer the main street is thronged with a constant stream of honking motors and scarlet-faced day-trippers; if you're arriving in July or August, you'll be better off hightailing it straight for the castle, which sits on a hilltop above the village, or just steering clear altogether.

The beautiful **St George's Church** dates mostly from the 15th century and boasts a wonderfully carved fan-vaulted rood screen. Further down the road is the **watermill** (☎ 821759; Mill Lane; admission £2.60; 🕒 11am-4.45pm Jul-Sep, 11am-4.45pm Sat-Thu Apr-Jun, Oct & Nov), a working 18th-century mill that's been turning since the Domesday Book.

The **NPA visitor centre** (☎ 821835; Dunster Steep; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) is in the main car park.

Dunster Castle

Dunster Castle (NT; ☎ 821314; admission castle £6.80, garden & park only £3.70; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat-Wed Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat-Wed Nov) has served as a fortress for around a thousand years, but the present-day castle bears little resemblance to the original Norman stronghold. The 13th-century gateway is probably the only original part of the castle; the turrets, battlements and towers were all added later during a 19th-century make-over. The castle boasts Tudor furnishings, stunning 17th-century plasterwork and ancestral portraits of the Luttrell family, as well as fine terraced gardens with views across Exmoor and the coastline.

Sleeping & Eating

Yarn Market Hotel (☎ 821425; www.yarnmarkethotel.co.uk; s £40, d £60-80; P ⊠) This small hotel overlooks the yarn market, with pleasant, well-proportioned rooms and the usual selection of floral fabrics, identikit furniture and cream-coloured walls.

Spears Cross (☎ 821439; www.spearscross.co.uk; 1 West St; s £42, d £55-65; ⊠) Expect cake and tea on arrival at this peach-coloured cottage near the heart of the village. Several rustic rooms are tucked around the creaky corridors of the 15th-century house, and most boast their own eccentric features, from wonky ceilings to wood-panelled walls.

Luttrell Arms (☎ 821555; www.luttrellarms.co.uk; d from £100; P ⊠) Huge flagstones, heavy armchairs and faded tapestries are dotted around the lounge and downstairs bar of this glorious old coaching inn, and a few of the four-poster rooms upstairs would put most royal retreats to shame. If you can, bag the master suite with its rib-vaulted ceiling, sunken fireplace and oak-wood bed.

Cobblestones Café (☎ 821595; lunches £5-10; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This dinky little café makes the perfect spot for a light lunch or a sticky teatime cake. Baguettes, pâtés, salads and homemade pies dominate the lunchtime menu, and it's open on Saturday nights for a set three-course supper.

Getting There & Away

Bus 28 runs from Minehead to Taunton via Dunster hourly Monday to Saturday, and nine times on Sunday. Bus 398 travels to Exford (30 minutes, once daily except Sunday) and Dulverton (40 minutes, six daily except Sunday), and to Minehead (50 minutes, six daily except Sunday) in the opposite direction.

DORSET

With everything from full-blown seaside resorts to Iron Age settlements and chocolate-box country hamlets, Dorset is one of the region's most eclectic counties. It's perhaps best known as the home of Thomas Hardy, who immortalised the area in his classic novels of the 19th century. If you're of a literary frame of mind, there are plenty of sites related to the author scattered around the county, especially around his long-standing home in Dorchester. For something more active, head for the popular south-coast towns of Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth, but if it's scenic views you're after, there are glorious stretches of coastline around the Purbeck Peninsula, Lulworth Cove and Lyme Bay.

Orientation & Information

Dorset stretches along the south coast from Lyme Regis on the western (Devon) border, to Christchurch abutting Hampshire on the east. Dorchester, the county town, sits in between and is the most central base for exploring, but Lyme Regis or Weymouth will suit those who prefer the coast.

Dorset has several useful regional websites:

Dorset County Council (www.dorset-cc.gov.uk)
Rural Dorset (www.ruraldorset.com)
West Dorset (www.westdorset.com)

Getting Around

One of the reasons for Dorset's backwater status is that few major transport routes cross it. There are two slow railway lines, running from Bristol and Bath through Dorchester west to Weymouth, and from London and Southampton to Bournemouth and Poole.

The main operator in east and central Dorset is **Wilts & Dorset** (☎ 01202-673555; Poole; www.wdbus.co.uk). For western Dorset and on to Devon and southern Somerset, **First** (☎ 01305-783645; www.firstgroup.com) is the main operator.

Regional timetables are available free from tourist offices or bus stations, or by download from the companies' websites. Otherwise call **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk).

BOURNEMOUTH

☎ 01202 / pop 167,527

Sprawling for 7 miles along the southern Dorset coastline, Bournemouth is one of the largest seaside resorts in Britain, famous for its grand seafront and broad sandy beaches. It's a place with a rather strange split personality; part faded Victorian resort, part corporate anytown and part mass-market tourist holiday park, where wrinkly day-trippers and holidaying coach parties rub shoulders with stag parties, boozed-up clubbers and conference delegates. Still, there are plenty of things to keep you occupied: sunbathing, shopping and water sports by day, and a wealth of bars, clubs and dodgy variety shows to explore by night.

Orientation & Information

Bournemouth straggles all the way along the coast towards Poole to the west and Christchurch to the east. The pier marks the central seafront area, and northeast from there is the town centre and train station.

Bournemouth Library (☎ 454848; 22 The Triangle; 🕒 10am-7pm Mon, 9.30am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-5pm Wed, 10am-4pm Sat) Internet access.
Cyber Place (☎ 290099; 25 St Peter's Rd; internet per hr £2; 🕒 10am-11pm)
Tourist office (☎ 451700; www.bournemouth.co.uk; Westover Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) Beside the Winter Gardens.

Sights & Activities

The first holiday home was established in Bournemouth in 1811 by the local landowner Louis Tregonwell, and during the 19th century the town grew into one of the largest Victorian resorts in Britain. The ornamental **Pleasure Gardens** are the most obvious reminder of the town's genteel golden age, but sadly most of Bournemouth's Victorian architecture has been smothered by a modern mass of retail shops and conference centres.

An ostentatious mix of Italianate villa and Scottish baronial pile, the **Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 451800; www.russell-cotes.bournemouth.gov.uk; Russell-Cotes Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has had a recent £3m overhaul, and is particularly renowned for its galleries of Victorian art and sculpture, as well as a fine Japanese collection gathered by the museum's benefactors, Sir Merton and Lady Russell-Cotes.

Right next to Bournemouth Pier, **Oceanarium** (☎ 311933; www.oceanarium.co.uk; admission £7.50; 🕒 10am-6pm) re-creates various marine habitats from around the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Amazon River and the inky depths of the deep sea.

The tethered hot-air balloon hovering above the city is the **Bournemouth Eye** (☎ 314539; www.bournemouthballoon.com; Lower Gardens; admission £10; 🕒 7.20am-11pm Apr-Sep). Ascents last about 15 minutes and reach around 500ft, and, unsurprisingly, the views are great.

Construction on Bournemouth's long-awaited **artificial reef** – the only one of its kind in Europe – was due to start in late 2006 and, at the time of writing, was expected to be finished by the summer of 2007.

Dorset Belle Cruises (☎ 558550; www.dorsetbelles.co.uk) operates ferry trips to Swanage, Poole and Brownsea Island from Bournemouth Pier.

Sleeping

Bournemouth is chock-a-block with B&Bs, but none of them are going to win any awards for design or originality.

Bournemouth Backpackers (☎ 299491; www.bournemouthbackpackers.co.uk; 3 Frances Rd; dm £12-15) This small, 20-bed hostel is inside a plain suburban house near the bus and train stations. The dorms are small and basic, with aluminium bunk beds and minimal facilities, but it's cheap and friendly. Reception is only open from 5pm to 6pm weekdays, and closed all weekend, so book ahead.

Tudor Grange (☎ 291472; www.tudorgrangehotel.co.uk; 31 Gervis Rd; s £45-52, d £60-70; 🅿) Escape Bournemouth's suburban drudgery at this smart half-timbered house, which stands in private grounds and offers much more character than most of the hotels around town. The oak-panelled, armchair-ridden public rooms set the tone for the rest of the hotel: antiquated, frill-heavy and rather faded, with soft mattresses, battered furniture and ancient television sets.

Balincourt Hotel (☎ 552962; 58 Christchurch Rd; www.balincourt.co.uk; s/d from £45/60; 🅿 🚭) In a town of decidedly average B&Bs, this is a surprisingly comfortable choice, with rooms ranging from tiny austere singles to spacious superior rooms with small sitting areas, oodles of chintz and the odd cast-iron fireplace.

Langtry Manor (☎ 553887; www.langtrymanor.com; Derby Rd, East Cliff; s/d £70/140; 🅿 🏊) For more style, seek out this gabled mansion built by Edward VII for his mistress, Lilly Langtry. It's by far the best place to stay in Bournemouth, brimming over with original furniture, patterned carpets, potted plants and Edwardian prints.

Eating

Indian Ocean (☎ 311222; 4 West Cliff Rd; mains £8-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Standard Indian dishes are supplemented by intriguing Korai and Bangladeshi specials at this snazzy Indian place, with a modern, funkily lit interior hidden away behind a rather tacky glass frontage.

Ciao (☎ 555657; 144 Old Christchurch Rd; mains £8-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This small, contemporary café-bar is a great option for pizza, pasta and gourmet panini, with sliding doors opening onto the street and a plain, minimalist theme.

West Beach (☎ 587785; Pier Approach; mains £12-20; 🕒 daily) Bournemouth's best beachfront location and finest food go hand in hand at this excellent seafood brasserie, with a clean, chic interior and a fantastic alfresco deck.

Basilica (☎ 757722; 73 Seamoor Rd; 3-course menu £14; 🕒 Mon-Sat) On a sunny summer's day, you could almost convince yourself you were on the Côte d'Azur at this buzzy restaurant a mile from the town centre. Farm-fresh ingredients, crunchy salads and a daily fish board are all laced with a punchy Mediterranean tang.

Getting There & Away

National Express runs from London (£17.60, 2½ hours, hourly), Bristol (£14.60, 3¾ hours, one daily) and Oxford (£17.80, three hours, two daily).

Bus X3 runs half-hourly from Salisbury (1¼ hours) and on to Poole (20 minutes) every hour, while the X34/35 comes from Southampton (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday). There's a multitude of buses between Bournemouth and Poole (15 minutes).

Trains run every half-hour from London Waterloo (£34.50, two hours); half of these continue on to Poole (£2.70, 10 minutes), Dorchester South (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Weymouth (£10.50, one hour).

POOLE

☎ 01202 / pop 144,800

Poole is an altogether more attractive place than its brash, busy sister just along the bay. The town has grown up around its pretty old harbour, which was once busy with fishing boats and trading vessels, and now bustles with designer yachts and cruise boat. The quay area is dotted with restaurants and salty old pubs, and the Sandbanks area has an excellent beach and is a popular centre for water sports.

The **tourist office** (☎ 253253; www.pooletourism.com; Poole Quay; 🕒 9.15am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is on the quay.

Sights & Activities

BROWNSEA ISLAND

This small wooded **island** (☎ 707744; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/brownsea; admission £4.40; 🕒 10am-6pm mid-Jul–early Sep, 10am-5pm Mar–mid-Jul & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) in Poole Bay is now a nature reserve and wildlife haven run by the National Trust. There are several tranquil walks around the island, which is home to a population of deer, peacocks and rare red squirrels, as well as terns, gulls and wading birds.

Brownsea Island Ferries (☎ 01929-462383; www.brownseaislandferries.com; to Brownsea adult/child £6.50/4.50) goes to Brownsea and also offers cruises to Sandbanks (adult/child £4.50/3.50) and the other bay islands, as well as a daily trip to Wareham (adult/child £8.50/5).

POOLE OLD TOWN & HARBOUR

Poole Old Town has attractive 18th-century buildings, including a wonderful **Customs House** and **Guildhall**. The **Scaplen's Court Museum** (☎ 633558; Old High St) is housed in the town's most complete medieval building, and is open to the public in August, when it hosts displays on domestic life in Poole throughout the ages.

The Waterfront Museum is currently undergoing a major programme of refurbishment, but the **Local History Centre** (☎ 262621; 🕒 10am-3pm) next door is still open, with some small displays exploring Poole's history.

WATER SPORTS

There are loads of water-sports operators in the Poole area offering everything from wakeboarding to powerboating. Try **H2O Sports** (☎ 733744; www.h2o-sports.co.uk) or **FC Watersports Academy** (☎ 708283; www.fcwatersports.co.uk) for windsurfing, kayaking and kitesurfing. The wakeboarding specialists are **Poole Wakeboarding** (☎ 07799-878734; www.poolewakeboarding.co.uk).

Shockwave (☎ 558850; www.parkstonebay.com) offers 10-minute speedboat trips around the bay, and you can try powerboating and sailing with **Rockley Watersports** (☎ 0870 777 0541), or jet skiing with **Absolute Aqua** (☎ 666118; www.absoluteaqua.co.uk).

POOLE LIGHTHOUSE

This cutting-edge **arts centre** (☎ 685222; www.lighthousepoole.co.uk; 21 Kingland Rd) hosts a lively events calendar including live music, theatre, film and exhibitions.

Sleeping & Eating

Milsoms Hotel (☎ 609000; www.milsomshotel.co.uk; 47 Haven Rd; d £75; 🚭) A beautifully appointed semi-boutique hotel decked out in tasteful tones of mauve and cream, and finished with thoughtful extras such as cafetieres and Molton Brown bath products. Breakfast is served in the Loch Fyne restaurant, one of the top places in town for seafood.

Mansion House (☎ 685666; www.themansionhouse.co.uk; Thames St; s £90, d £140-160; 🅿 🚭) This beautiful brick mansion just off the harbourfront is almost as renowned for its lavish bedrooms as for its glamorous fine-dining restaurant. Indian, Oriental and cottage themes distinguish the upmarket décor, and all the rooms are littered with individual touches (from brass beds to antique suites).

Custom House (☎ 676767; Poole Quay; mains from £12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This exciting continental-style brasserie is housed, as its name suggests, in Poole's refurbished customs house. Downstairs there's a funky coffee bar furnished with chrome seats and technicolour walls, which majors in pastries, cakes and quick lunches; upstairs the smart Georgian-style dining room specialises in seafood and steak.

Other options:

Saltings (☎ 707349; saltings_poole@yahoo.co.uk; 5 Salterns Way; d from £60; 🚭 💻) Unusual marine-themed B&B in a great location just off Poole Quay.

BH13 (☎ 701101; 37 Haven Rd; mains £10-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Glossy British-Asian fusion restaurant in Canford Cliffs.

Storm (☎ 674970; 16 High St; mains £13-18; 🕒 dinner) An excellent seafood restaurant along High St.

Getting There & Around

Countless buses cover the 20-minute trip to Bournemouth. National Express runs hourly to London (£17.60, three hours). Train connections are as for Bournemouth, just 13 minutes closer to London Waterloo (£36.10).

You can hire bikes from **Cycle Paths** (☎ 680123; www.cycle-paths.co.uk; Dolphin Shopping Centre) for around £15 per day.

Sandbanks Ferry (☎ 01929-450203; www.sandbanksferry.co.uk; pedestrian/car 90p/£2.80) crosses to Studland every 20 minutes. This is a short cut from Poole to Swanage, Wareham and the west Dorset coast, but summer queues can be horrendous.

Bus 152 goes from Poole to Sandbanks (15 minutes, hourly).

SOUTHEAST DORSET

Dorset's most beautiful stretch of coastline runs along its southeastern edge, dotted with glittering bays and crumbling cliffs, as well as the romantic ruins of Corfe Castle and the remote Isle of Purbeck (actually a peninsula).

Wareham & Around

☎ 01929 / pop 2568

Saxons established the sturdy settlement of Wareham on the banks of the River Frome in around the 10th century, and the remains of their defensive walls can still be seen encircling the town. St Martin's Church dates from around the same period, and is one of the last remaining Saxon churches in Dorset. The town is also well known for its connections to the enigmatic figure of TE Lawrence, immortalised in David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Purbeck tourist office (☎ 552740; www.purbeck.gov.uk; Holy Trinity Church, South St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 1.45-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is opposite the library.

SIGHTS

The bijou **Wareham Museum** (☎ 553448; East St; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Easter-Oct) has an interesting Lawrence of Arabia collection and artefacts dating from the town's Iron Age, Roman and Saxon history.

The tiny Saxon **St Martin's Church** dates from about 1020. Inside there's a 12th-century fresco on the northern wall and a marble effigy of Lawrence of Arabia.

The tiny cottage of **Clouds Hill** (NT; ☎ 405616; admission £3.10; 🕒 noon-5pm Thu-Sun Apr-Oct) was TE Lawrence's rural retreat, and remains largely unchanged since his death in 1935. There's a small exhibition exploring Lawrence's life and his achievements during WWI; there are also a few relics that hint at his enduring fascination with the art and culture of the Middle East.

Lawrence was stationed at Bovington Camp, now the **Tank Museum** (☎ 405096; www.tankmuseum.org; adult/child £10/7; 🕒 10am-5pm), 6 miles from Wareham. He died at Bovington Military Hospital six days after a motorcycle accident nearby. The museum has a collection of more than 300 armoured vehicles, from the earliest WWI prototypes to remnants from the first Gulf War.

Nearby is **Monkey World** (☎ 462537; www.monkeyworld.co.uk; Longthorns; adult/child £9/6.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug), a sanctuary for rescued chimpanzees, orang-utans, gibbons, marmosets and some ridiculously cute ring-tailed lemurs.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gold Court House (☎ 553320; www.goldcourthouse.co.uk; St John's Hill; s/d £40/60; 🚭) Set on a small square, this sweet little 18th-century house jettisons the normal chintzy décor in favour of a refined, pared-back look. There are a couple of rooms tucked in around the house's attic beams, characterised by clean white walls, blonde pine and the odd mahogany dresser.

Old Granary (☎ 552010; The Quay; d £70-95) This village pub–cum-hotel is perched in an idyllic spot beside the riverbanks. The downstairs bar is littered with rustic knick-knacks and mismatched furniture, and the cluttered country theme continues into the upstairs rooms, reached via a little 'Alice door' carved into the wood-panelled walls.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 142, 143 and 144 run between Poole (35 minutes) and Wareham hourly (every two hours on Sunday). Bus 142/143 stops at Wareham hourly on its way from Poole (40 minutes) to Swanage (30 minutes).

Corfe Castle

☎ 01929

The fractured ruins of **Corfe Castle** (NT; ☎ 481294; admission £5; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mar, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) are perched on a grassy hilltop with commanding views along the southern Dorset coastline. The castle was the ancestral home of Sir John Bankes, right-hand man and attorney general to Charles I, and was besieged by Cromwellian forces during the Civil War; following a six-week defence directed by the plucky Lady Bankes, the castle was eventually betrayed from within and reduced to rubble by the Roundheads' cannons.

Buses 142/143 run hourly from Poole (50 minutes) through Wareham (15 minutes) to Swanage (20 minutes) via Corfe Castle.

The **Swanage Steam Railway** (☎ 425800; www.swanagerailway.co.uk; adult day rover £8.50) runs between Swanage and Norden and stops at Corfe Castle. Joint tickets to the castle and railway are available, and there are discounts if you arrive by public transport.

Blue Pool

Once a clay pit, the amazing **Blue Pool** (☎ 01929-551408; www.bluepooluk.com; Furzebrook; admission £4.40; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mar-Nov) is renowned for its colour-shifting abilities, which are due to minute particles of clay refracting light through the water. In a matter of seconds the lake can change from deep aquamarine to pale blue to turquoise green. Designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the lakeshore is also home to rare wildlife including green sand lizards and Dartford warblers. The pool is signposted from the A351; bus 142/143 from Wareham (10 minutes) stops nearby.

Lulworth Cove & the Coast

☎ 01929

West of Swanage the Isle of Purbeck gives way to a stunning stretch of coastline, pockmarked by shimmering bays, towering cliffs and tiny beaches. The coast's best-known features are the natural rock arch at **Durdle Door** and the almost perfectly circular bay at **Lulworth Cove**, but the clifftop walks around St Aldhem's Head and the nature reserve at Kimmeridge Bay are also worth exploring.

Built in 1608 as a hunting lodge, **Lulworth Castle** (☎ 400352; www.lulworth.com; East Lulworth; admission £7; 🕒 10.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) has endured several centuries of ups and downs – including several extravagant owners, repeated remodelling and a disastrous fire in 1929 – but it's now been thoroughly refurbished by English Heritage. The castle hosts everything from blues concerts to jousting tournaments during the summer.

The best place to stay is the **Lulworth Beach Hotel** (☎ 400404; www.lulworthbeachhotel.com; Lulworth Cove; d £80-95), a modern, airy place with several uncluttered rooms sprinkled with wicker furniture and colourful prints. The best have French doors leading onto small balconies with views over Lulworth Cove.

Alternatively, try **Cove House** (☎ 400137; West Lulworth; d £75; 🚭), a double-gabled Victorian villa with a brace of solid, cosy B&B rooms.

There's also a basic **YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5940; School Lane; dm £11.80; 🕒 Mar-Oct) in West Lulworth, and a great clifftop campsite at **Durdle Door Holiday Park** (☎ 400200; durdle.door@lulworth.com; tents £14-18; 🕒 Mar-Oct).

DORCHESTER

☎ 01305 / pop 16,171

Thomas Hardy connections abound around Dorchester, which doubles in his novels as the market town of Casterbridge. Hardy was born just outside Dorchester in the village of Higher Bockhampton, and the author lived here for much of his life; its solid red-brick streets, stately Georgian town houses and agricultural heritage seem to have held an enduring fascination for him, and the place certainly seems immediately familiar if you've ever read any of his novels.

Orientation & Information

Most of Dorchester's action takes place along South St, which runs north into pedestrianised Cornhill and then emerges in High St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 267992; dorchester.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Antelope Walk; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Nov; 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is brimming over with Hardy information, and sells several town walks and 'location' guides to the main places featured in his novels.

Sights

THOMAS HARDY SITES

Hardy's early career was as an apprentice architect, and he was responsible for the design of **Max Gate** (NT; ☎ 262538; Alington Ave; admission £2.60; 🕒 2-5pm Mon, Wed & Sun Apr-Sep), where he lived from 1885 until his death in 1928. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* were both written here, but it's a little slim on sights. The house is a mile east of Dorchester on the A352.

The small cob-and-thatch **Hardy's Cottage** (NT; ☎ 262366; admission £3; 🕒 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), where the author was born, is also a bit short on attractions, but it makes an evocative stop for Hardy completists. It's in Higher Bockhampton, 3 miles northeast of Dorchester.

Look out for Hardy's statue at the top of High West St.

OTHER SIGHTS

Dorchester was once a thriving Roman settlement, and excavations have uncovered the foundations of a 1st-century **Roman villa** behind the town hall on Northern Hay. The layout of the house is clearly visible and the remains of the main building, housed within a glass structure, boast remarkable mosaic floors.

The **Dorset County Museum** (☎ 262735; www.dorsetcountymuseum.org; High West St; admission £6; 🕒 10am-5pm Jul-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun) houses archaeological finds from Maiden Castle, canvases by Gainsborough and Alfred Wallis, and stunning fossils from the Jurassic Coast, but the highlight is the museum's extensive Hardy collection – the largest in the world – donated by the author's second wife, Florence. Many of Hardy's manuscripts, diaries and notebooks are on display, and there's a reconstruction of his study at Max Gate.

Rather less educational are the tacky dino-themed displays at the **Dinosaur Museum** (☎ 269880; www.dinosaur-museum.org.uk; Icen Way; adult/child £6.50/4.75; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm). The **Tutankhamun Exhibition** (☎ 269571; www.tutankhamun-exhibition.co.uk; High West St; adult/child £6.50/4.75; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm) and the **Terracotta Warriors Museum** (☎ 266040; www.terracottawarriors.co.uk; East High St; admission £5; 🕒 10am-5.30pm) are slightly better, with atmospheric reconstructions of the pharaoh's tomb and the X'in warriors. There's also a **Teddy Bear Museum** (☎ 263200; Antelope Walk; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), populated by various historical and famous bears, as well as a rather disturbing family of life-sized teddies.

If you still haven't had your museum fix, head for the **Keep Military Museum** (☎ 264066; www.keepmilitarymuseum.org; Bridport Rd; adult/child £4/3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-Mar), which traces the story of the historic Devon and Dorset regiments with plenty of regimental uniforms, vintage muskets and mean-looking cannons.

On the northern side of town is **Poundbury**, a mock-Georgian town dreamt up by Prince Charles as a model housing development for the 21st century.

Sleeping

Casterbridge Hotel (☎ 264043; www.casterbridgehotel.co.uk; 49 High East St; r £45-75) This exquisite guesthouse lives up to the town's heritage atmosphere: some rooms are classically countrified, with florid wallpaper, stylish table lamps and feathery duvets, while others are more contemporary. Breakfast is served in a lovely conservatory overlooking the rear garden.

Little Court (☎ 261576; www.littlecourt.net; Charminster; r from £69; P ☒) A mile from Dorchester, this Lutyens-style manor house makes for a lavish night's sleep, with huge, luxurious bedrooms equipped with CD players and complementary umbrellas, and a gourmet breakfast made with produce from the hotel's walled garden.

Yalbury Cottage (☎ 262382; www.yalburycottage.com; Lower Bockhampton; s/d £70/100; P ☒) Just a short stroll from Hardy's birthplace, this chocolate-box thatched house looks appropriately rustic from the outside, but all of the eight bedrooms are modern, comfortable and current, if a little short on period features.

Also recommended:

Beggars Knap (☎ 268191; beggarsknap@hotmail.co.uk; 2 Weymouth Ave; s £28-35, d £55; P ☒) Solid Victorian house with smart rooms, some with private bay windows.

Higher Came Farmhouse (☎ 268908; www.highercame.co.uk; d £58; P ☒) Fine farmhouse B&B with snug, homey rooms and a great farm-fresh brekkie.

Eating

Prezzo (☎ 259678; 6 High West St; pizza £7-9; 🕒 daily) A typically reliable outpost of this Italian chain, with a baroque interior filled with black-leather sofas and twisted willow, and top-notch pizzas and pastas.

Sienna (☎ 250022; 36 High West St; 2-course set lunch/dinner £13/24; 🕒 Tue-Sat) The stripped-down décor might be austere at this miniature restaurant, but the food is colourful and complex, mixing modern British cooking with Spanish, Italian and southern French flavours. Zesty.

Getting There & Around

There's a daily National Express coach to London (£19.20, four hours).

The hourly bus 31 travels from Dorchester to Weymouth (30 minutes) and to Lyme Regis (one hour 40 minutes). Bus 10 also travels to Weymouth (35 minutes, three per hour). Bus 188 goes to Poole (one hour, three daily Monday to Saturday).

There are two train stations, Dorchester South and Dorchester West, both southwest of the town centre. Trains run at least hourly from Weymouth (£2.90, 11 minutes) to London (£37.80, 2½ hours) via Dorchester South, Bournemouth (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Southampton (£17, 1¼ hours).

Dorchester West has connections with Bath (£11.30, 1¾ hours) and Bristol (£12.40, two hours).

Dorchester Cycles (☎ 268787; 31 Great Western Rd; per day £15) hires bikes.

AROUND DORCHESTER

Maiden Castle

The massive earthwork ramparts of Maiden Castle, Europe's largest Iron Age hill fort, stretch for 3 miles and enclose nearly 20 hectares. The site has been inhabited since Neolithic times but the first fort was built here around 800 BC. The Romans captured it in AD 43 and occupied it until the mid-4th century. The sheer size of the walls and ditches is stunning, and there are wonderful views across the countryside.

The castle is located 1.5 miles southwest of Dorchester.

Cerne Abbas & the Cerne Giant

The little village of Cerne Abbas is a typically attractive Dorset hamlet, home to the ruins of an old **abbey** (adult/child £1/20p) and a pretty 14th-century church. But its most famous resident is the notoriously well-endowed **Cerne Giant**, who stands to attention on a hilltop above the village. Opinions vary regarding the age of the 55m-high giant – some believe him to be a pre-Roman fertility symbol, although no official record exists of the giant until the 17th century – but one thing's for certain: this old man is certainly not shy about showing off his vital assets.

ZORBING

If hurtling down a steep incline trapped inside a giant plastic ball sounds like fun rather than borderline insanity, then the zany sport of zorbing could be for you. The zorb itself is a 3.2m inflatable ball with around 1000 internal ties that serve as shock absorbers, with an inner cockpit that can take up to three 'zorbonauts'. Once you're inside and strapped in, the zorb's let loose and you speed down the hill at around 50mph, protected by a cushion of bouncy air. At least, that's the theory.

Zorb South (☎ 01929-426595; www.zorbsouth.co.uk), based in Dorchester, is one of the UK's only licensed operators. Prices start at £35 for a single zorb ride.

TOP FIVE ANCIENT SITES

- **Stonehenge** (p289) The world's most famous stone circle; shame no-one's got a clue what it was for.
- **Avebury** (p293) Much bigger, and arguably more impressive than Stonehenge, this huge ring of stones is part of an amazing network of ancient sites.
- **Maiden Castle** (opposite) The biggest Iron Age Fort anywhere in Europe.
- **Glastonbury Tor** (p268) The Isle of Avalon, gateway to the underworld, or a fairy king's palace? Who cares – it's still a breathtaking sight.
- **Old Sarum** (p289) Another stunning Iron Age stronghold on Salisbury Plain.

For accommodation try the **New Inn** (☎ 01300-341274; thenewinncerneabbas.co.uk; 14 Long St; d from £55; P ☒), a great country coaching inn with simple rustic rooms and an excellent menu of pub grub, and for food head for the thatched **Royal Oak** (☎ 01300-341797; Long St; mains £5-8; 🕒 lunch & dinner), an ivy-clad pub renowned for its hearty Dorset dishes and traditional ales.

Dorchester, 8 miles to the south, is reached on bus 216 (20 minutes, four times Monday to Saturday).

WEYMOUTH

☎ 01305 / pop 48,279

Stripey deckchairs, candy-floss stalls, rickety windbreaks and Punch & Judy booths line the beachfront at the well-worn seaside town of Weymouth, once a favoured holiday haunt of the English gentry and now more popular with bawling nippers, family day-trippers and members of the blue-rinse brigade. Depending on your point of view, it's either a glorious example of British kitsch or a soulless summation of everything that's wrong with the domestic seaside experience. Whatever you make of the present-day town, Weymouth looks set for a massive transformation over the next five years, having been chosen as the sailing centre for the 2012 London Olympics.

Orientation & Information

Central Weymouth is strung along the seafront, which stretches west to the old harbour with its cluster of pubs, fishermen's cottages and seafood restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 785747; tic@weymouth.gov.uk; The Esplanade; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) sells discounted tickets to many local attractions and can help arrange local accommodation for a fee.

Sights

In the old part of town, Brewer's Quay has a shopping centre and plentiful attractions, including **Timewalk** (☎ 777622; Hope Sq; adult/child £4.50/3.25; 🕒 10am-5.30pm), which explores various key events in Weymouth's history.

Nearby, the **Weymouth Museum** (admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) uncovers the town's maritime heritage with displays on smuggling, paddle steamers and shipwrecks. The **Tudor House** (☎ 812341; 3 Trinity St; adult/child £2.50/1; 🕒 1-3.45pm Tue-Fri Jun-Sep, 2-4pm 1st Sun of the month Oct-May) is one of the few 17th-century buildings left in Weymouth and is furnished in period style.

Aquatic exhibits are on offer at **Sea Life** (☎ 788255; www.sealife.co.uk; Lodmoor Country Park; adult/child £11.50/8; 🕒 10am-5pm), with seal, otter and penguin enclosures, a shark nursery and a new green turtle sanctuary.

Perched on the end of the promontory, 19th-century **Nothe Fort** (☎ 766465; www.fortressweymouth.co.uk; Barrack Rd; adult/child £5/1; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, 2.30pm-4.30pm Sun Oct-Apr) is currently undergoing refurbishment, but its collection of weapons and military memorabilia is still on display while the work is being carried out.

Activities

Weymouth has been a popular seaside spot since King George III (the mad one) took an impromptu dip here in 1789. People are still flocking to the seafront some two and a half centuries later, and during the summer holidays the beach is usually packed with nose-to-tail sunbathers. Deckchairs and buckets and spades are available on the seafront; you can also rent pedalos for £5 per hour.

With so many wrecks dotted along the coastline, Weymouth and Portland are popular dive centres; try **Dive Dorset** (☎ 860269; www.divedorset.com; 15 Castletown) on Portland, or the **Old Harbour Dive Centre** (☎ 760888; oldharbourdive@aol.com; 11 Nothe Pde) in Weymouth. Day trips start at around £85 per day including equipment.

Windsurfing is also excellent along the Weymouth coastline; **Second Wind** (☎ 01305 835301; www.second-wind.co.uk; Overcombe Beach) and **Windtek** (☎ 787900; www.windtek.co.uk; 109 Portland Rd) both offer lessons (£90 per day) and hire gear (£15 to £30 per day).

Weymouth & Portland Sailing Academy (☎ 860101; www.wpnsa.org.uk; Osprey Quay) runs two-day sailing courses for £155.

Sleeping

Weymouth is practically wall-to-wall B&Bs, but you'll need to discover your inner fondness for net curtains and doily-covered tablecloths. There are plenty of camp sites near Chesil Beach and Weymouth Bay.

Chatsworth (☎ 785012; www.thechatsworth.co.uk; 14 The Esplanade; d £30-100; Ⓟ) Nicely positioned near the Old Harbour, this smart guesthouse offers much more up-to-date accommodation than most of Weymouth's B&Bs. The nicest room has French doors leading to a private balcony overlooking the harbour, and there are a couple more with lovely bay windows; there's also a good in-house brasserie and a pleasant harbourside breakfast terrace.

Seaham (☎ 782010; www.theseaham.co.uk; 3 Waterloo Pl; d £56-60; ☒) The best of the cluster of B&Bs along Victoria Rd, with five well-kept rooms finished in pastel fabrics, prefab furniture and faintly nautical colours. The rooms at the front just about have sea views, but traffic noise on the main seafront road can be a headache.

Eating

Perry's (☎ 785799; 4 Trinity Rd; mains £12-17; 🕑 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) Right on the quayside, this relaxed bistro specialises in seafood straight off the Weymouth fishing boats – crab soup, lobster bisque and roast sea bass are served up in the light, cheery dining room, dotted with local paintings and dried flowers.

Isobar (☎ 750666; 19 Trinity Rd; mains £12.95-15.50; 🕑 dinner Tues-Sat) For a quirkier vibe head along the quay to this baroque-styled gastropub, where rough wood floors meet gilt-framed pictures, hot-pink walls and upholstered chairs. There's a great chalkboard menu ranging from Thai fishcakes to wholetail scampi, and plenty of bottled beers and international wines.

You couldn't come to Weymouth and not try the local staple of fish and chips. The top chippy in town is **King Edward's** (☎ 786924; 100 The Esplanade); for the full seaside experience, chase down the chips with a classic 99 from **Rossi's** (☎ 785557; 92 The Esplanade), which has been serving up ice creams on the Weymouth seafront since the 1930s.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There's one daily National Express coach to London (£19.20, 4¼ hours).

Bus 10 is the quickest to Dorchester (30 minutes, three per hour). The hourly bus 31 also stops in Dorchester en route to Lyme Regis (two hours) and Axminster, while the X53 travels from Weymouth to Wareham (50 minutes, six daily, four on Sunday) and Bournemouth (two hours), and to Abbotsbury (35 minutes), Lyme Regis (90 minutes) and Exeter (three hours) in the opposite direction. Bus 1 travels regularly over to Portland (30 minutes).

TRAIN

Trains run hourly to London (£63, 2¾ hours) via Dorchester South (£2.90, 11 minutes) and Bournemouth (£10.50, one hour), and every two hours to Dorchester West, Bath (£11.60, two hours) and Bristol (£13, 2¼ hours).

AROUND WEYMOUTH

Portland

☎ 01305

Portland is essentially a craggy island joined to the mainland by the long sweep of Chesil Beach. Portland's unique white limestone has been quarried here for centuries and has found its way into many of the world's finest buildings (including the British Museum, St Paul's Cathedral and the UN Headquarters in New York). The views from the rugged clifftops are breathtaking, especially around the **lighthouse** (☎ 861233; 🕑 11am-5pm Apr-Sep) on Portland Bill, where there's also a summer-only **tourist office** (☎ 861233). It costs adult/child £2.50/1.50 to climb the 41m-high tower. Look out for the treacherous stretch of water known as The Race.

Sturdy **Portland Castle** (EH; ☎ 820539; admission £3.50; 🕑 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 4pm Oct) is one of the finest examples of the defensive castles constructed during Henry VIII's castle-building spree. You can try on period armour and get great views over Portland harbour.

The first curator of the **Portland Museum** (☎ 821 804; 217 Wakeham St; adult/child £2.50/free; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Fri-Tue Easter-Oct) was Dr Marie Stopes, who pioneered the birth-control pill. Housed in two thatched cottages overlooking Church Ope Cove, the museum has some varied displays exploring Portland's history, especially its reputation for smuggling and shipwrecks; there are also some huge fossils and ammonites collected along the Jurassic Coast nearby.

Bus 1 runs to Portland from Weymouth every half-hour.

Chesil Beach

A massive expanse of pebbles stretches along the coast for 10 miles between Portland and Abbotsbury, at times reaching up to 15m high. It's an incredible sight and encloses Fleet Lagoon, a haven for water birds.

The stones vary from pebble size at Abbotsbury in the west to around 15cm in diameter at Portland. Local fishers can supposedly tell their position along the bank by gauging the size of the stones.

Chesil Beach Centre (☎ 01305-760579; Ferrybridge; 🕑 11am-6pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct-Mar) provides information and organises talks and guided walks.

LYME REGIS

☎ 01297 / pop 4406

Nestled at the edge of the Jurassic Coast, the genteel resort of Lyme Regis is famous for two things: fossils and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Some of the first dinosaur skeletons ever discovered in Britain were found here during the 19th century, and the town has been a magnet for fossil-hunters ever since.

Information

Lyme Regis' **tourist office** (☎ 442138; lyme.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Guildhall Cottage, Church St; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) arranges regular fossil-hunting expeditions along the Jurassic Coast.

Sights

One of the 19th century's most famous fossil collectors was Mary Anning (1799–1847), who was born in a seafront cottage on a site now occupied by the **Lyme Regis Philpot Museum** (☎ 443 370; www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk; Bridge St; adult/child £2.20/1.60; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Mary Anning found the first ichthyosaur skeleton near Lyme Regis in 1812, and did much to pioneer the science of modern-day palaeontology.

The **Dinosaurland Fossil Museum** (☎ 443541; www.dinosaurland.co.uk; Coombe St; adult/child £5/4; 🕑 10am-5pm) has lots of excellent fossil displays and sells fossils and ammonites at the museum shop.

The **Cobb**, Lyme's famous 183m-long jetty-cum-breakwater, was constructed in the 13th century to protect the town from sea surges. Though it's been patched up and improved many times over the last 700 years, it still fails to protect the town from occasional flooding; consequently a massive sea protection programme is currently under way along the town's seafront, and you might well find the town beach is closed when you're there,

There's a low-budget **Marine Aquarium** (☎ 443678; admission £2.50; 🕑 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, extended hours peak season) near the Cobb.

Sleeping & Eating

Old Lyme Guest House (☎ 442929; www.oldlymeguesthouse.co.uk; 29 Coombe St; s £35, d £60-65; Ⓟ ☒) Once home to Lyme's old post office, this stone-fronted house is now an award-winning B&B, with several feminine rooms finished in pale creams and soft hues, topped off by patterned curtains and china trinkets.

Hotel Alexandra (☎ 442010; www.hotelalexandra.co.uk; Pound St; s £60, d £100-140; Ⓟ ☒) Built in 1735 for a dowager countess and run for the last 25 years by a local family, this delightful small hotel feels like a relic from another age. There are 26 quietly classy rooms, 16 of which have views across Lyme Bay.

Fairwater Head Hotel (☎ 678349; Hawkchurch; www.fairwaterheadhotel.co.uk; d £140-190; Ⓟ ☒) A couple of miles north of Lyme Regis in the 'village of roses', this excellent country retreat brings an unmistakably Gallic accent to its rural English setting. The plush en suite bedrooms overlook

WORTH THE TRIP

Abbotsbury Swannery (☎ 871858; New Barn Rd; admission £7.50; 🕑 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Oct) Founded by the monks of Abbotsbury's monastery about 600 years ago. Every May the colony of mute swans makes its nests at the swannery, protected by the pebble banks of Chesil Beach; the cygnets usually hatch out in late June. Feathers from the Abbotsbury swans are still used in the helmets of the Gentlemen At Arms, the Queen's official bodyguard, and by calligraphers at the historic insurance broker Lloyd's of London.

private gardens and are divided between the main house and a newer annexe.

Cobb Arms (☎ 443242; Marine Pde; mains £5-10) This salty old harbourfront pub pulls the best pint in Lyme and also serves up plates of battered cod, scampi and chips, and club sandwiches.

Broad St Restaurant (☎ 445792; 57-58 Broad St; lunch £9-13, 3-course dinner £25; 🕒 dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) This spanking-new restaurant on the main street has quickly built up a reputation as one of the finest on the south Dorset coast. Blindingly white tablecloths, flagstone floors and sparkling wine glasses set the upmarket mood, and the menu dazzles with its dishes of local Dorset produce and Lyme Bay fish.

Getting There & Away

Bus 31 runs to Dorchester (1¼ hours) and Weymouth (1¾ hours) hourly (every two hours on Sunday). Bus X53 goes west to Exeter (1¾ hours) and east to Weymouth (1½ hours, six daily, four on Sunday).

SHERBORNE

☎ 01935 / pop 9350

All streets in the honey-stoned town of Sherborne lead to its majestic abbey, once the most important church in Wessex; both of Alfred the Great's elder brothers, Ethelred and Ethelbert, are buried beneath the abbey's flagstones. Sherborne was the capital of Wessex until the end of the 11th century, when the bishopric moved to Old Sarum, but continued to be a town of strategic and religious importance throughout the Middle Ages. These days it's a quiet and attractive market town, filled with antique shops, haberdashers and estate agents; reminders of its former status remain in its twin castles, which stand on either side of the silvery sheen of Sherborne Lake.

Sherborne's **tourist office** (☎ 815341; sherborne.tic@westdorset-dc.gov.uk; Digby Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) stocks the free *All About Sherborne* leaflet with a map and town trail. **Walking tours** (£3; 🕒 11am Fri May-Sep) depart from the tourist office and last 1½ hours.

Sights

SHERBORNE ABBEY

Established early in the 8th century, the **Abbey Church of St Mary the Virgin** (☎ 812452; suggested donation £2; 🕒 8.30am-6pm late Mar-late Oct, 8.30am-4pm Nov–mid-Mar) became a Benedictine abbey in 998 and functioned as a cathedral until 1075. The church boasts the oldest fan vaulting in the country, and there are several intriguing tombs – look out for the one belonging to John Digby, Earl of Bristol, flanked by his two wives. Ethelred and Ethelbert are buried in the corner of the abbey. On the edge of the abbey close are the **St Johns' Almshouses** (admission £1.50; 🕒 2-4pm Tue & Thu-Sat May-Sep), constructed in the 15th century.

OLD CASTLE

East of the town centre stand the ruins of the **Old Castle** (EH; ☎ 812730; admission £2.40; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct), originally constructed from 1107 by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, and briefly owned by Sir Walter Raleigh. It became a Royalist stronghold during the Civil War, but Cromwell reduced the 'malicious and mischievous castle' to rubble after a 16-day siege in 1645.

SHERBORNE CASTLE

Sir Walter Raleigh began building **New Castle** (☎ 813182; www.sherbornecastle.com; adult/child house £8/free, gardens only £4/free; 🕒 11am-4.30pm Tue-Thu & weekends Apr-Oct) – really a splendid manor house – in 1594. However, by 1608 he was back in prison, this time at the hands of James I, who eventually sold the castle to John Digby, the Earl of Bristol, in 1617. It's been the Digby family residence ever since, and contains fine collections of art, furniture and porcelain, as well as grounds landscaped by Capability Brown.

SHERBORNE MUSEUM

Sherborne Museum (☎ 812252; www.sherbornemuseum.co.uk; Church Lane; adult/child £1/free; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30pm-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct) explores the town's history through costumes, period photos and some fascinating illustrations, as well as a digital version of the 'Sherborne Missal', the most exquisite illuminated manuscript to survive from the Middle Ages. The original is held in the British Library.

Sleeping

Old Vicarage (☎ 251117; www.milborneport.freeserve.co.uk; s £63-84, d £79-112; 🅿 🚭) The vicar obviously wasn't short of a few bob when he built this fantastic neo-Tudor mansion on the edge of the village. The gabled, double-chimneyed frontage is impressive enough, but the interior rooms are even smarter, melding country clutter and Victorian bric-a-brac with a vaguely Oriental ambience.

Eastbury Hotel (☎ 813131; www.theeastburyhotel.co.uk; Long St; s/d from £49/90; 🅿 🚭) The rooms might be named after flowers at this fine red-brick house, but they're refreshingly light on floral patterns; the atmosphere is closer to a Georgian country residence, with plenty of upholstered armchairs, rich wallpapers and wooden furniture, a conservatory restaurant and a walled garden (complete with croquet lawn).

Also recommended:

Alders (☎ 220666; www.thealdersbb.com; Sandford Orcas; d £48-60; 🅿 🚭) Traditional rooms in a modernised stone house 3 miles' drive from Sherborne.

Stoneleigh Barn (☎ 815964; www.stoneleighbarn.com; North Wootton; d £55-80; 🅿 🚭 🏊) Elegantly converted stone barn with four-poster-bed rooms, 2 miles from town.

Eating

Pear Tree Deli (☎ 812828; Half Moon St; mains £4-8; 🕒 lunch) This delectable deli is an ideal place to stock up on a gourmet sandwich or some lunchtime picnic supplies. Homemade pies, soup specials and Greek cheeseburgers are chalked up above the counter, and the shelves are stacked with a mouthwatering array of chutneys, jams, bikkies and cakes.

Half Moon Inn (☎ 812017; Half Moon St; mains £5-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) The town's liveliest pub specialises in hot food platters and local brews, best appreciated on the streetside terrace as the sun sets over the abbey nearby.

Paprika (☎ 816429; Half Moon St; mains £7-12; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Laminate floors, scarlet-leather chairs and big glass windows characterise the interior of this thoroughly modern Indian place, where the menu also contains a few surprises – try the vegetarian curry with cashew nuts or chicken curry with pineapple and coconut.

Getting There & Away

Bus 57 runs from Yeovil (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday), as does the quicker 58 (15 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday), which sometimes continues to Shaftesbury (1½ hours).

Hourly trains run to Exeter (£13.20, 1¼ hours), London (£35.10, 2½ hours) and Salisbury (£9.20, 45 minutes).

AROUND SHERBORNE

Montacute House

This extraordinary Elizabethan **manor house** (NT; ☎ 01935-823289; montacute@nationaltrust.org.uk; admission house £8, garden only £4.50; 🕒 house 11am-5pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar–Oct, garden 11am-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar–Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar) was built in the 1590s for Sir Edward Phelips, a Speaker of the House of Commons. The house is particularly renowned for its remarkable plasterwork, fine chimneypieces and magnificent tapestries, but the highlight is the Long Gallery, decorated with Elizabethan-era portraits borrowed from the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Bus 681 from Yeovil (20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday) to South Petherton passes close by.

WILTSHIRE

Three thousand years ago the fields and plains of Wiltshire were home to one of Britain's oldest civilisations, whose legacy remains in the strange stone circles of Stonehenge and Avebury, as well as a number of barrows, processional avenues and burial mounds scattered around the county. Mystery and myth often seem to go hand in hand in this corner of Britain – Wiltshire is also home to a menagerie of chalk figures as well as an ever-changing gallery of crop circles throughout the summer months.

Information

The **Visit Wiltshire** (☎ 0870 240 5599; www.visitwiltshire.co.uk) website is the best source for pre-planning info, and you can pick up the usual range of brochures and leaflets from local tourist offices.

Getting Around

BUS

The bus coverage in Wiltshire still leaves a lot to be desired, especially in the northwest of the county. The two main operators:

First (☎ 0845 606-4446; www.firstgroup.com) Serves the far west of the county.

Wilts & Dorset Buses (☎ 01722 336855; www.wdbus.co.uk) Covers most destinations.

For general bus info contact the **Wiltshire Bus Line** (☎ 0845 709 0899). The Wiltshire Day Rover (adult/child £6.50/4.50) is valid with most operators and can be bought from bus drivers.

TRAIN

Rail lines run from London to Salisbury and beyond to Exeter and Plymouth, branching off north to Bradford-on-Avon, Bath and Bristol, but most of the smaller towns and villages aren't served by trains.

SALISBURY

☎ 01722 / pop 43,335

Centred on a majestic cathedral topped by a soaring central spire – the tallest in England – the gracious city of Salisbury has been an important provincial city for more than a thousand years. Its streets are dusted with buildings from almost every period in Britain's architectural history – medieval walls, half-timbered Tudor town houses, Georgian mansions and Victorian villas – but Salisbury is a modern, lively place, with plenty of bars, restaurants and terraced cafés, as well as a concentrated cluster of excellent museums.

Orientation

Salisbury's compact town centre revolves around Market Sq, which is dominated by its impressive guildhall. The train station is a 10-minute walk to the west, while the bus station is just 90m north up Endless St.

Information

Library (☎ 324145; Market Pl; ⏲ 10am-7pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Post office (cnr Castle St & Chipper Lane)

Salisbury Online (☎ 421328; ⏲ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Tourist office (☎ 334956; www.visitsalisburyuk.com; Fish Row; ⏲ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun May, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr)

Washing Well Laundrette (☎ 421874; 28 Chipper Lane; ⏲ 8am-9pm)

Sights

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

Britain is a nation blessed with countless stunning churches, but few can match the grandeur and sheer spectacle of **Salisbury Cathedral** (☎ 555100; www.salisburycathedral.org.uk; requested donation adult/child £4/2; ⏲ 7.15am-6.15pm Sep-May, 7.15am-7.15pm Jun-Aug). Built between 1220 and 1258, the cathedral bears all the hallmarks of the early English Gothic style, with an elaborate exterior decorated with pointed arches and flying buttresses, and a sombre, austere interior designed to keep its congregation suitably pious.

Beyond the highly decorative **West Front**, a small passageway leads into the 70m-long nave, lined with handsome pillars of Purbeck stone. Look out for a fascinating old **clock** from 1386 in the north aisle, probably the oldest working clock in the world. At the eastern end of the ambulatory the glorious **Prisoners of Conscience** stained-glass window (1980) hovers above the ornate tomb of Edward Seymour (1539–1621) and Lady Catherine Grey. Other notable tombs include that of William Longespée, son of Henry II and half-brother of King John.

The splendid **spire** was added in the mid-14th century. At 123m it's the highest in Britain, and weighs around 6500 tons; an elaborate system of cross-bracing, scissor arches and supporting buttresses was needed to keep it upright. Look closely and you'll see that the additional weight has buckled the four central piers of the nave. Sir Christopher Wren surveyed the cathedral in 1668 and calculated that the spire was leaning by 75cm; reinforcement on the notoriously 'wonky spire' continues to this day.

There are 1½-hour tower **tours** (adult/child £4/3; ⏲ 11.15am & 2.15pm Mar & Oct, 11.15am, 2.15pm & 3.15pm Apr-Sep, plus 5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Aug), which climb up 332 vertigo-inducing steps to the base of the spire, from where there are jaw-dropping views across the city.

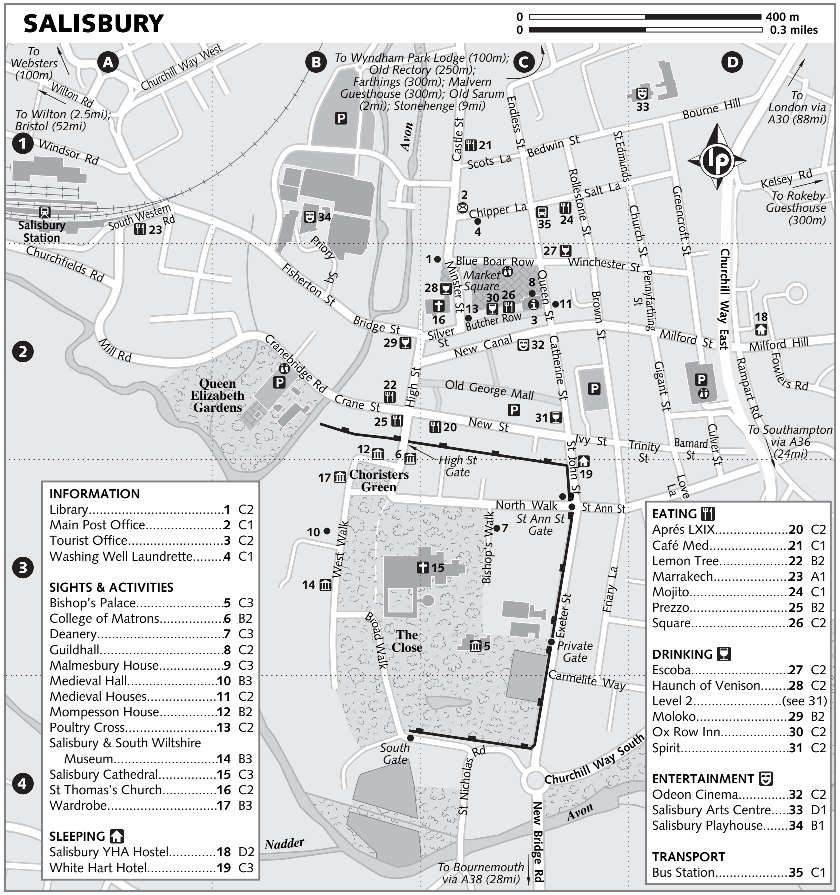
One of the four surviving copies of **Magna Carta** is kept in the cathedral's **Chapter House** (⏲ 9.30am-6.45pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb).

CATHEDRAL CLOSE

The cathedral is surrounded by one of the country's most beautiful medieval **closes**. Many of the houses date from the same period as the cathedral, although the area was heavily restored during an 18th-century cleanup by James Wyatt. The close is encircled by a sturdy outer wall, constructed in 1333; the stout gates leading into the complex are still locked every night.

The highlight at the **Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum** (☎ 332151; www.salisburymuseum.org.uk; 65 The Close; admission £4; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug) is the interactive Stonehenge gallery, but there are also some interesting artefacts recovered from Old Sarum, and lots of ceramics, historical artefacts and paintings, including a dreamy watercolour of Stonehenge by JMW Turner.

Military buffs will enjoy the **Wardrobe** (☎ 414536; www.thewardrobe.org.uk; 58 The Close; adult/child £2.75/75p; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb, Mar & Nov), home to the official museum of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment.


SALISBURY
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0 0.3 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
To Websters (100m)
To Wilton (2.5mi); Bristol (52mi)
To Wyndham Park Lodge (100m); Old Rectory (250m); Farthings (300m); Malvern Guesthouse (300m); Old Sarum (2mi); Stonehenge (9mi)
To London via A30 (88mi)
To Rokeby Guesthouse (300m)
To Southampton via A36 (24mi)
To Bournemouth via A38 (28mi)
Salisbury Station
Churchill Way West
Wilton Rd
Windsor Rd
South Western Rd
Churchfields Rd
Mill Rd
Fisherton St
Priory Sq
Avon
Castle St
Endless St
Scots La
Bedwin St
Bourne Hill
Kelsey Rd
Chipper La
Salt La
Rollestone St
St Edmunds Church St
Greencroft St
Churchill Way East
Blue Boar Row
Market Square
Winchester St
Pennyfarthing St
Minster St
Queen St
Butcher Row
Silver St
Bridge St
Brown St
Milford St
Milford Hill
Fowlers Rd
New Canal
Cranebridge Rd
Queen Elizabeth Gardens
Crane St
Old George Mall
High St
New St
Catherine St
Gigant St
Rampart Rd
Ivy St
Trinity St
Barnard St
Culver St
Love La
High St Gate
Choristers Green
St John St
St Ann St
North Walk
St Ann St Gate
West Walk
Bishop's Walk
Friary La
Exeter St
Broad Walk
The Close
Private Gate
Carmelite Way
South Gate
St Nicholas Rd
Churchill Way South
New Bridge Rd
Nadder
Avon

INFORMATION

Library	**1**	C2
Main Post Office	**2**	C1
Tourist Office	**3**	C2
Washing Well Laundrette	**4**	C1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bishop's Palace	**5**	C3
College of Matrons	**6**	B2
Deanery	**7**	C3
Guildhall	**8**	C2
Malmesbury House	**9**	C3
Medieval Hall	**10**	B3
Medieval Houses	**11**	C2
Mompesson House	**12**	B2
Poultry Cross	**13**	C2
Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum	**14**	B3
Salisbury Cathedral	**15**	C3
St Thomas's Church	**16**	C2
Wardrobe	**17**	B3

SLEEPING

Salisbury YHA Hostel	**18**	D2
White Hart Hotel	**19**	C3

EATING

Aprés LXIX	**20**	C2
Café Med	**21**	C1
Lemon Tree	**22**	B2
Marrakech	**23**	A1
Mojito	**24**	C1
Prezzo	**25**	B2
Square	**26**	C2

DRINKING

Escoba	**27**	C2
Haunch of Venison	**28**	C2
Level 2	(see 31)	
Moloko	**29**	B2
Ox Row Inn	**30**	C2
Spirit	**31**	C2

ENTERTAINMENT

Odeon Cinema	**32**	C2
Salisbury Arts Centre	**33**	D1
Salisbury Playhouse	**34**	B1

TRANSPORT

Bus Station	**35**	C1

Built in 1701, **Mompesson House** (NT; ☎ 335 659; The Close; admission £4.40; ⏲ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed Mar-Oct) is a fine Queen Anne house with magnificent plasterwork ceilings, exceptional period furnishings and a wonderful carved staircase. It was used as the location for the 1995 film of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Just inside narrow High St Gate is the **College of Matrons**, founded in 1682 for widows and unmarried daughters of clergymen. South of the cathedral is the **Bishop's Palace**, now the Cathedral School, parts of which date back to 1220.

ST THOMAS'S CHURCH

This elegant church was built for cathedral workmen in 1219 and named after St Thomas Becket, although it was modified in the 15th century. Its most famous feature is the amazing **doom painting** above the chancel arch, painted in 1475. It depicts Christ on the Day of Judgment, sitting astride a rainbow flanked by visions of heaven and hell.

MARKET SQUARE

Markets were first held here in 1219, and the square still bustles with traders every Tuesday and Saturday. The narrow lanes surrounding the square reveal their medieval specialities (Oatmeal Row, Silver St), but today the action is confined to the square, where you can pick up anything from fresh fish to dodgy digital watches. The 15th-century **Poultry Cross** is the last of four market crosses that once stood here.

Tours

Salisbury City Guides (☎ 320349; www.salisburycityguides.co.uk) leads 1½-hour tours (adult/child £3.50/1.50) from the tourist office at 11am from April to October, Saturday and Sunday only November to March. There are also themed walks at 2.30pm Saturday and an 8pm ghost walk on Friday night from May to September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Salisbury YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6018; salisbury@yha.org.uk; Milford Hill; dm £17.50; 🅿 ☒) This great hostel has a wide choice of rooms, ranging from smallish doubles to big, cheap bunk dorms, and a lovely location with private gardens surrounding the listed 19th-century house.

MIDRANGE

Rokeby Guesthouse (☎ 329800; www.rokebyguesthouse.co.uk; 3 Wain-a-long Rd; s/d from £45/55; 🅿 ☒ 💻) This grand red-brick house is the pick of the midrange B&Bs in town. It's an elegant Edwardian affair, distinguished by its above-average bedrooms (the best of which have half-tester beds and freestanding enamel baths) and a cute breakfast conservatory, reached by a winding iron staircase.

Wyndham Park Lodge (☎ 416517; www.wyndhamparklodge.co.uk; 51 Wyndham Rd; s £38-42, d £50-55; ☒ 🅿 💻 wi-fi) This old-school B&B is a touch more traditional, but still very comfortable. The top rooms are the huge family suite and the stylish garden double with doors onto a private patio; little extras such as complimentary fruit teas and wi-fi are very welcome.

Old Rectory (☎ 502702; www.theoldrectory-bb.co.uk; 75 Belle Vue Rd; d £50-70; 🅿 ☒)Another old clergyman's residence–turned–B&B, with straightforward rooms decked out in cream and yellow, and a charming walled garden with views to St Edmund's Church. Some of the en suite bathrooms are tiny, though.

Websters (☎ 339779; www.websters-bed-breakfast.com; 11 Hartington Rd; s £40-44, d £50-54; 🅿 ☒ 💻) A choice of checks, stripes or floral wallpapers greets you at this much-recommended B&B. Some of the colour schemes are a little lurid, but treats such as hot chocolate, free broadband and a varied tea tray more than make up for that.

Also recommended:

Farthings (☎ 330749; www.farthingsbandb.co.uk; 9 Swaynes Close; s/d £25/50; 🅿 ☒) Victorian-era B&B with quilted beds and a pleasant garden; the cheaper rooms share facilities.

Malvern Guesthouse (☎ 327995; www.malvernguesthouse.com; 31 Hulse Rd; d from £50; 🅿 ☒) Family-run guesthouse with pretty pastel rooms and homemade marmalade.

TOP END

White Hart Hotel (☎ 327476; St John St; whitehartsalisbury@macdonald-hotels.co.uk; 🅿) This big, central hotel is a great option if you're up for some pomp and pampering. The imposing porticoed frontage stands right opposite the cathedral close, and the hotel offers exactly the kind of swish rooms and attentive service you'd expect. The four-poster-bed rooms are worth the premium.

Eating

BUDGET

Square (☎ 331136; Market Sq; mains from £5; 🕐 daily) The kind of urban-style café you might not expect to find in provincial Salisbury, with clean lines and cream-and-chocolate tones, and a menu of paninis, pasta bakes and designer breakfasts.

Prezzo (☎ 341333; 52-54 High St; mains £7-9; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Housed in a decidedly wonky half-timbered house, this sleek Italian does all the standard pizza, pasta and Italian dishes fantastically well, supplemented by some unusual choices including Sicilian chicken and a delicious red pesto burger.

Lemon Tree (☎ 333471; 92 Crane St; mains £7-12; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Packed with character but short on space, this tiny bistro crams tables into a conservatory dining room. Serves light, modern British food with a quirky twist – try 'tipsy' chicken, or pork pan-fried with apricots.

MIDRANGE

Mojito (☎ 417999; 2-4 Salt Lane; tapas £2-6, mains from £8; 🕐 lunch & dinner) Authentic tapas and an unmistakably Spanish atmosphere characterise this sassy restaurant, which has an open-plan kitchen and a couple of dining areas split over twin floors. Our top tip is the fantastic paella, which also comes in a veggie version.

Café Med (☎ 328402; 68 Castle St; mains £9-20; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This breezy brasserie brings some Mediterranean vim to Salisbury's streets. The menu offers British classics shot through with sun-kissed flavours – think sirloin steak with grilled vine tomatoes, or roast cod with pancetta.

Marrakech (☎ 411112; 129-133 South Western Rd; 🕐 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) This great little restaurant is the nearest you'll get to North Africa in Wiltshire, serving tangy tagines and bona fide Moroccan couscous in a terracotta-coloured dining room full of earthenware pots and tiled tables. There's even a small souk where you can buy Moroccan handicrafts.

Après LXIX (☎ 340000; 67-69 New St; mains £10-18; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This achingly trendy bistro feels closer to Soho than Salisbury, with an artfully understated dining room filled with exposed brickwork and designer spotlights, and an imaginative menu with a magpie eye – think good old British produce spiced up with Italian, French and Oriental flavours.

Drinking

Moloko (☎ 507050; 5 Bridge St) This curious bar takes its visual cue from Stalinist Russia – black paint, stark interiors and red stars abound – and you'll need the constitution of a Tartar to stomach the flavoured vodkas.

Escoba (☎ 329608; 5-7 Winchester St) Orange walls, Dalí-esque paintings and a hot and sultry atmosphere make this Spanish-style bar a popular drinking den. Cool Sol beers and jugs of margarita are the tipples of choice, accompanied by plates of fresh tapas.

Spirit (☎ 338387; 46 Catherine St) This hip hangout is always packed with a young and beautiful crowd on weekends, with banging tunes on the decks and a choice of technicolour cocktails.

Level 2 (☎ 330053; 48 Catherine St) Salisbury's newest club, with guest DJs on Fridays and a 'champagne and house' night on Saturdays.

Salisbury has plenty of decent pubs: try the medieval **Haunch of Venison** (☎ 322024; 1-5 Minster St) for a choice of more than 50 malt whiskies, or the **Ox Row Inn** (☎ 424921; 10-11 Ox Row) for local ales.

Entertainment

Salisbury Arts Centre (☎ 321744; www.salisburyartscentre.co.uk; Bedwin St) Housed in the converted St Edmund's Church, this exciting arts centre has a reputation for staging cutting-edge theatre, dance and live gigs; photography and art exhibitions are often held in the foyer.

The **Salisbury Playhouse** (☎ 320333; www.salisburyplayhouse.com; Malthouse Lane) is the town's big arts venue, and hosts top touring shows, musicals and new plays. The **Odeon Cinema** (☎ 0870 505 0007; New Canal) is quite possibly the only cinema in the world with a medieval foyer.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Three National Express coaches run daily to London via Heathrow (£14, 3½ hours), and there's a daily coach to Bath (£8.30, 1½ hours) and Bristol (£8.30, two hours).

Salisbury is the main bus hub in Wiltshire. The X4/X5 travels direct to Bath (two hours, hourly, five on Sunday) via Bradford-on-Avon (1½ hours), and there are regular local buses to Lacock, Shaftesbury, Devizes, Avebury and Stonehenge.

TRAIN

Trains run half-hourly from London Waterloo station (£25.20, 1½ hours) and hourly on to Exeter (£22.70, 1¾ hours) and the southwest. Another line runs from Portsmouth (£12.50, 1½ hours, hourly) via Southampton (£7.10, 45 minutes), with connections to Bradford-on-Avon (£8.10, 40 minutes, hourly), Bath (£11.20, one hour, half-hourly) and Bristol (£13.60, 1¼ hours, half-hourly).

AROUND SALISBURY

Old Sarum

The abandoned settlement of **Old Sarum** (☎ 01722-335398; admission £2.50; 🕐 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Mar) sits on a grassy rise about 2 miles from Salisbury. It began life as a huge hill fort during the Iron Age, and was later occupied by both the Romans and the Saxons. By the mid-11th century, the town had grown into one of the most important in the west of England; William the Conqueror convened one of his earliest councils here, and the first cathedral was built here in 1092, snatching the bishopric from nearby Sherborne Abbey. But Old Sarum was never a comfortable place to live: it was short on water and exposed to the elements, and in 1219 the bishop was given permission to move the cathedral to a new location beside the River Avon, founding the modern-day city of Salisbury. By 1331 the cathedral had been demolished for building material and Old Sarum had been practically abandoned; a scale model in Salisbury Cathedral illustrates how the site once looked.

There are free guided tours at 3pm in July and August, and medieval tournaments, open-air plays and mock battles on selected days.

Buses 3, 5, 6 and 8 all run at least hourly to Old Sarum throughout the week.

STONEHENGE

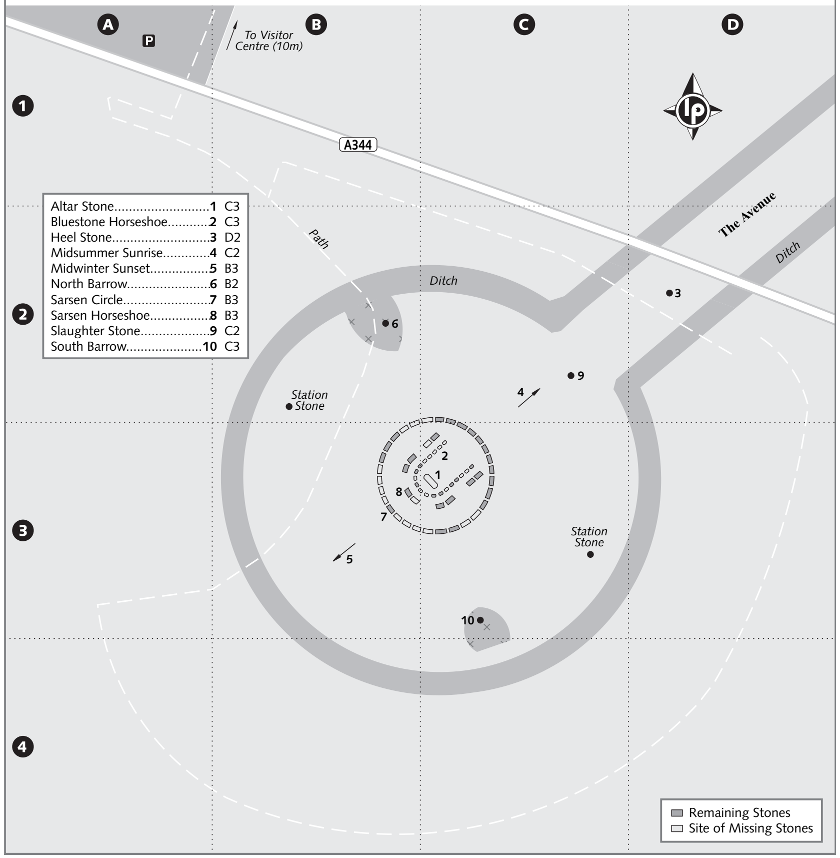
Arguably one of the world's most important prehistoric sites, and certainly one of Britain's biggest tourist attractions, the ancient ring of monolithic stones at **Stonehenge** (EH/NT; ☎ 01980-624715; admission £5.90; 🕒 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm mid-Mar–May & Sep–mid-Oct, 9.30am-4pm mid-Oct–mid-Mar) has been attracting a steady stream of pilgrims, poets and philosophers for the last 5000 years. Despite the constant flow of traffic from the main road beside the monument, and the huge numbers of visitors who traipse around the stones on a daily basis, Stonehenge still manages to be a mystical, ethereal place – a haunting echo from Britain's forgotten past, and a reminder of a lost civilisation that once walked the many ceremonial avenues across Salisbury Plain. Even more intriguingly, it's still one of Britain's great archaeological mysteries: although there are countless theories about what the site was used for, ranging from a sacrificial centre to a celestial timepiece, in truth no-one really knows what drove prehistoric Britons to expend so much time and effort on its construction.

The Site

Construction at Stonehenge started around 3000 BC, when the outer circular bank and ditch were erected. A thousand years later an inner circle of granite stones, known as bluestones, was added. It's thought these mammoth four-ton blocks were hauled from the Preseli Mountains in south Wales, some 250 miles away.

Around 1500 BC, Stonehenge's main stones were dragged to the site, erected in a circle and topped by massive lintels to make the trilithons (two vertical stones topped by a horizontal one). The sarsen (sandstone) stones were cut from a hard rock found on the Marlborough Downs 20 miles from the site. It's estimated that dragging one of these 50-ton stones to Stonehenge would require about 600 people.

STONEHENGE



THE STONEHENGE PROJECT

Despite being one of Britain's most treasured monuments, Stonehenge is far from perfect. Hemmed in by busy roads and wire barricades, jammed with visitors, and underscored by a cacophony of roaring traffic, it's a long way from the haven of peace and spiritual tranquillity most visitors expect to find. Thankfully, plans are afoot to reinvent the Stonehenge experience. Over the next decade the main A303 road will be tunnelled underneath the monument and a new visitor centre will be built 2 miles from the site, with regular connecting buses to the stones. Despite the obvious good sense of the plan, progress has been predictably slow; planning applications for the new visitor centre have still not been approved and the rerouting of the road is a long way off. Keep up to speed with developments at www.thestonehengeproject.org.

Around this time, the bluestones were rearranged as an **inner horseshoe** with a central **altar stone**, surrounded by a **second horseshoe** of five trilithons. Three of these are intact; the other two have just a single upright. Then came the **major circle** of 30 massive vertical stones, of which 17 uprights and six lintels remain.

Further out, another circle is delineated by the 58 **Aubrey Holes**, named after John Aubrey, who discovered them in the 1600s. Just inside this circle are the **South and North Barrows**, each originally topped by a stone. Like many stone circles in Britain (including Avebury), the inner horseshoes are aligned to coincide with sunrise at the midsummer solstice, which seems to support the theory that the site was some kind of astronomical calendar.

Prehistoric pilgrims would have entered the site via the **Avenue**, whose entrance to the circle is marked by the **Slaughter Stone** and the **Heel Stone**, located slightly further out on one side.

A marked pathway leads around the site, and although you're not permitted to walk into the circle itself, it's still possible to see the stones fairly close up. An audio guide is included in the admission price.

Private tours can be arranged outside normal opening hours by calling ☎ 01722-343834, but you'll need to book well in advance.

Getting There & Away

Bus 3 connects Salisbury bus station with Stonehenge (40 minutes, nine daily, eight on Sunday) via Old Sarum.

Several companies offer organised tours: **City Sightseeing** (☎ 01789-294466; £16 including admission; 3 tours daily Apr-Oct) Two-hour tours from Salisbury train station to Stonehenge via Old Sarum. **Wessex Tourist Guides** (☎ 01980-623463 or ☎ 01980-620596) Specialist local tour guides recommended by English Heritage.

AROUND STONEHENGE

Stonehenge forms part of a complex of ancient monuments. North of Stonehenge and running roughly east–west is the **Cursus**, an elongated embanked oval, and the slightly smaller **Lesser Cursus** nearby. No-one is sure exactly what these sites were used for, but as usual there's no shortage of theories, ranging from ancient sporting arenas to processional avenues for the dead. Other prehistoric sites around Stonehenge include a number of burial mounds, including the **New King Barrows**, and **Vespasian's Camp**, an Iron Age hill fort.

Just north of Amesbury and 1.5 miles east of Stonehenge is **Woodhenge**, a series of concentric rings once marked by wooden posts. Excavations in the 1970s at Woodhenge revealed the skeleton of a child buried near the centre with a cloven skull.

STOURHEAD

Inspired by classical Italy, **Stourhead** (NT; ☎ 01747-841152; Stourton; admission garden or house £6.20, house & garden £10.40; 🕒 house 11am-5pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar–Oct, garden 9am-7pm or sunset year-round) is landscape gardening at its finest. The Palladian house has some fine Chippendale furniture and paintings by Claude and Gaspard Poussin, but for most visitors it's the sideshow to the magnificent 18th-century gardens, which spread out across the valley and feature stunning vistas, rare plants, magnificent trees and ornate temples. A lovely 2-mile circuit travels around the lake and to the **Temple of Apollo**. If you're feeling energetic, from near the **Pantheon**, a 3.5-mile side trip can be made to **King Alfred's Tower** (admission £2.30; 🕒 11.30am-4.30pm mid-Mar–Oct), a 50m-high folly with wonderful views.

Stourhead is off the B3092, 8 miles south of Frome in Somerset.

LONGLEAT

Half ancestral mansion, half safari park, **Longleat** (☎ 01985-844400; www.longleat.co.uk; adult/child house £10/7, grounds £3/2, safari park £10/7, all-inclusive passport £19/15; 🕒 house 10am-5.30pm year-round, safari park 10am-4pm Apr-Nov, other attractions 11am-5.30pm Apr-Nov) was the first stately home in England to open its doors to the public in 1946. Twenty years later, it also became Britain's first safari park, and over the last 40 years Capability Brown's landscaped grounds have been transformed into an amazing drive-thru zoo, populated by a menagerie of animals more at home on the African plains than the fields of Wiltshire. These days the zoo is backed up by a throng of touristy attractions, including a narrow-gauge railway, a Dr Who exhibit, a Postman Pat village, a pets' corner and a butterfly garden.

Longleat is about 3 miles from both Frome and Warminster.

MALMESBURY ABBEY

A wonderful blend of ruin and living church, **Malmesbury Abbey** (☎ 01666-826666; donation requested; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov–mid-Mar) began life as a 7th-century monastery, which was later replaced by a Norman church. By the mid-15th century the abbey had been embellished with a spire and twin towers; in 1479 a storm toppled the east tower and spire, destroying the eastern end of the church, and the west tower followed suit in 1662, destroying much of the nave. The present-day church is about a third of its original size. Notable features include the Norman doorway decorated with biblical carvings, the Romanesque **Apostle** carvings and a four-volume, illuminated bible dating from 1407. A window at the western end of the church depicts Elmer the Flying Monk, who in 1010 strapped on wings and jumped from the tower. Although he broke both legs, he survived and became a local hero.

Just below the abbey are the **Abbey House Gardens** (☎ 01666-822212; www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk; admission £5.50; 🕒 11am-5.30pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct) with a herb garden, river, waterfall and 5 acres of colourful blooms.

Bus 31 runs to Swindon (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), while 92 heads to Chippenham (35 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

LACOCK

☎ 01249

With its geranium-covered cottages, higgledy-piggledy rooftops and idyllic location next to a rushing brook, the medieval village of Lacock seems to have been preserved in aspic since the mid-19th century. The village has been in the hands of the National Trust since 1944, and is almost entirely untouched by modern development – there are no telephone poles or electric streetlights, and it's kept largely free of traffic thanks to the main visitor car park on the outskirts of the village. Unsurprisingly, it's a popular location for costume dramas and feature films – parts of the Harry Potter films, as well as BBC adaptations of *Moll Flanders* and *Pride and Prejudice*, were all filmed here.

Lacock Abbey

Lacock Abbey (NT; ☎ 730227; admission abbey, museum, cloisters & grounds £7.80, abbey, cloisters & grounds only £6.30; 🕒 abbey 1-5.30pm Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, gardens 11am-5.30pm Feb-Oct) was founded as an Augustinian nunnery in 1232 by Ela, Countess of Salisbury. After the Dissolution the abbey was sold to Sir William Sharington in 1539, who converted the nunnery into a home, demolished the church, tacked a tower onto the corner of the abbey and added a brewery. Some of the original 13th-century structure is evident in the cloisters and there are traces of medieval wall paintings. The recently restored botanic garden is also worth a visit.

In the early 19th century, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–77), a prolific inventor, developed the photographic negative while working at the abbey: the **Fox Talbot Museum of Photography** (☎ 730459; admission museum, cloisters & grounds only £4.80; 🕒 11am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm weekends Nov-Feb) details his ground-breaking work and displays a fine collection of his photographs.

Sleeping & Eating

our pick **Sign of the Angel** (☎ 730230; www.lacock.co.uk; 6 Church St; s £75, d £105-155; 🅿) This charmingly eccentric country restaurant and hotel makes a memorable place for an overnight stay. Rough wooden benches, rustic beams and old washpresses are scattered around the twin dining rooms, each of which boasts a crackling log-fire. Upstairs you'll find rooms crammed with antique beds, burnished chests and low ceilings. The restaurant specialises in traditional, old-fashioned English cooking – our tip is the 'angel plate' of cold meats and bubble and squeak, followed by treacle tart with clotted cream.

King John's Hunting Lodge (☎ 730313; kingjohns@amserve.com; 21 Church St; s/d £55/95; tearooms 🕒 11am-5.30pm) This tearoom-cum-B&B is a local landmark – it's housed in Lacock's oldest building and run by one of the village's biggest characters, an ex-shepherdess, nurse and celebrity chef. Local specialities such as 'priddy oggies' (a cheese pastry with pork, bacon and Stilton), cheese muffins and homemade elderflower cordial all find their way onto the eclectic menu, and upstairs you'll find snug, old-fashioned rooms crammed with quirky furniture and Tudor touches.

Other options:

Old Rectory (☎ 730335; www.oldrectorylacock.co.uk; s £35-50, d £60-75; 🅿 🚭) Elegant Victorian-style rooms in a Grade II–listed house dotted with stained-glass windows and patterned rugs.

George Inn (☎ 730263; 4 West St; mains from £8) A dinky 13th-century pub on the edge of the village, dispensing local ales and pub food.

Getting There & Away

Bus 234 runs hourly from Chippenham (Monday to Saturday, 20 minutes).

AROUND LACOCK

Corsham Court

Two miles northwest of Lacock, the Elizabethan mansion of **Corsham Court** (☎ 01249-701610; www.corsham-court.co.uk; admission £6.50; 🕒 2-5.30pm Tue-Thu & weekends Mar-Sep, 2-4.30pm weekends Oct-late Mar) dates from 1582, although the house and grounds were later improved by John Nash and Capability Brown. It's renowned for its superb art collection, featuring works by Reynolds, Caravaggio, Rubens and Van Dyck, and for its formal gardens, containing some stunning ornamental box hedges and a Gothic bathhouse.

AVEBURY

☎ 01672

While the tour buses make a beeline for Stonehenge, prehistoric purists head for the massive ring of stones at Avebury instead. Though it lacks the huge stones and dramatic trilithons of its sister site across the plain, Avebury is a much more rewarding place to visit: it's bigger, older and much quieter than Stonehenge, and judging by its huge scale, it may also have been a more important ceremonial site to its ancient builders.

Orientation & Information

The village itself is entirely encircled by the stones and neatly bisected by two main roads, but it's much easier to take advantage of the National Trust car park on the A4361, just a short walk from the village. The **tourist office** (☎ 539425; all.tic@kennet.gov.uk; Chapel Centre, Green St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a converted chapel near the centre of the village.

Sights

STONE CIRCLE

With a diameter of about 348m, Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world. It's also one of the oldest, dating from around 2500 to 2200 BC, between the first and second phase of construction at Stonehenge. The site originally consisted of an outer circle of 98 standing stones from 3m to 6m in length, many weighing up to 20 tons, carefully selected for their size and shape. The stones were surrounded by another circle delineated by a 5.5m-high earth bank and a 6m- to 9m-deep ditch. Inside were smaller stone circles to the north (27 stones) and south (29 stones).

WORTH THE TRIP

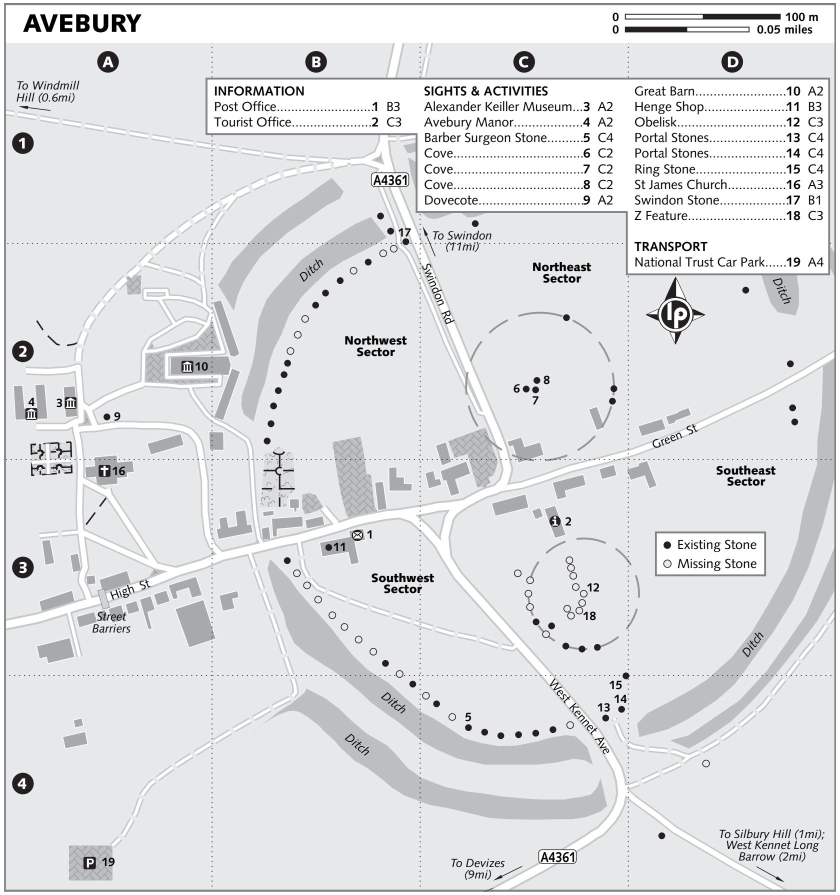
Woolley Grange (☎ 01225-864705; www.woolleygrangehotel.co.uk; Woolley Green; r £145-335; 🅿 🚭 🏊) This fabulous country house mixes boutique style with a refreshing family-friendly attitude to create one of the most welcoming hotels in Wiltshire. With its designer bedrooms, laid-back attitude and quietly impressive service, it's a place whose *raison d'être* seems to be keeping everyone in a state of mild euphoria throughout their stay; while the little 'uns are kept lavishly entertained with everything from giant trampolines to PlayStation 2s at the Woolley Bear Den, mum and dad can relax with a truly indulgent range of spa treatments, aromatherapy massages, gourmet meals and champagne cocktails by the heated outdoor pool. Rooms are all individually styled, with a smattering of patchwork quilts, shiny antiques and funky fixtures. Pricey, but worth every penny.

The present-day site represents just a fraction of the circle's original size. Many of the stones were buried, removed or broken up during the Middle Ages, when Britain's pagan past became something of an embarrassment to the medieval Church. In 1934 the wealthy businessman and archaeologist Alexander Keiller supervised the re-erection of the buried stones and planted markers to indicate those that had disappeared; he later bought the site for posterity using funds from his family's marmalade fortune.

Modern roads into Avebury neatly dissect the circle into four sectors. Start at High St, near the Henge Shop, and walk round the circle in an anticlockwise direction. There are 11 standing stones in the southwest sector, including the **Barber Surgeon Stone**, named after the skeleton of a man found under it. The equipment buried with him suggested he was a medieval travelling barber-surgeon, killed when a stone accidentally fell on him.

The southeast sector starts with the huge **portal stones** marking the entry to the circle from West Kennet Ave. The **southern inner circle** stood in this sector and within this circle was the **Obelisk** and a group of stones known as the **Z Feature**. Just outside this smaller circle, only the base of the **Ring Stone** remains.

The northwest sector has the most complete collection of standing stones, including the massive 65-ton **Swindon Stone**, the first stone encountered and one of the few never to have been toppled.



AVEBURY

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CROP CIRCLE CENTRAL

Wiltshire is famous across the world for its astonishing crop circles. These strange symmetrical patterns regularly appear in farmers' fields and areas of grassland across the county, and can range from basic circles to mind-boggling complex fractal designs. Some people believe they're caused by extraterrestrial life forms or freak weather patterns, while others are convinced they're simply the work of practical jokers with a penchant for high-school geometry. Check out www.cropcircleconnector.com, which has regular updates on new circles, or www.circlemakers.org, which claims to spill the beans on how the mysterious rings are made.

If you fancy spotting a circle for yourself, the best areas to see them are around the Marlborough Downs and Pewsey Vale; you can usually pick up tips at the **Barge Inn** (☎ 01672-851705) in Honeystreet, 5 miles east of Devizes, where the pool room has been devoted to detailing all the latest finds.

OTHER HISTORIC SITES

Avebury is surrounded by a network of ancient monuments. Lined by 100 pairs of stones, the 1.5-mile **West Kennet Ave** links the Avebury circle with the **Sanctuary**. Post holes indicate that a wooden building surrounded by a stone circle once stood at the Sanctuary, although no-one knows quite what the site was for.

Just to the west, the huge dome of **Silbury Hill** rises abruptly from the surrounding fields. At more than 40m high it's one of the largest artificial hills in Europe, and was constructed in stages from around 2500 BC, but no significant ancient relics have ever been found at the site, and the reason for its construction remains unclear. Due to erosion and the damage caused by earlier excavations, access is now forbidden; you can view it from a car park on the A4.

Across the fields south of Silbury Hill stands **West Kennet Long Barrow**, England's finest burial mound, dating from around 3500 BC. Its entrance is guarded by huge sarsens and its roof is constructed of gigantic overlapping capstones.

Northwest of the Avebury circle you'll find **Windmill Hill**, a Neolithic enclosure or 'camp' dating from about 3700 BC, the earliest site in the area.

The **Ridgeway national trail** starts near Avebury and runs westwards across **Fyfield Down**, where many of the sarsen stones at Avebury (and Stonehenge) were collected.

AVEBURY MANOR

Avebury Manor (NT; ☎ 539250; admission manor £3.80, garden only £2.90; 🕑 manor 2-4.40pm Sun-Tue, gardens 11am-5pm Fri-Tue) dates back to the 16th century but was later modified during the Edwardian era. Keiller bought the manor in 1939 and spent much of his later life here; now owned by the National Trust, the house is still used as a private residence. Entry is by timed ticket.

Housed in the old stables of Avebury Manor, the **Alexander Keiller Museum** (NT; ☎ 539250; admission £4.20; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) explores the archaeological history of the circle and traces the story of the man who dedicated his life to unlocking the secret of the stones.

Getting There & Away

Bus 5 runs to Avebury from Salisbury (1½ hours, four or five Monday to Saturday). Bus 49/X49 serves Swindon (30 minutes) and Devizes (25 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

DEVON

Bordered on either side by spectacular coastline, and blessed with a stunning landscape of wild moorland, craggy hills and rolling rural fields, it's hardly surprising that Devon is still one of the country's top tourist destinations. This historic county caters for practically all tastes, from the classic bucket-and-spade resorts of Torquay and Ilfracombe to the lively cities of Exeter and Plymouth and the open heaths and hiking trails of Dartmoor. If history is your thing, there are numerous country houses, museums and dramatic castles to discover, while the attractive towns of Dartmouth, Brixham and Totnes all offer a refreshingly different face to this sleepily scenic county.

Orientation & Information

Devon is bounded to the east by Somerset and Dorset, the border skirting the southern edge of Exmoor and hitting the coast west of Lyme

Regis. The border with Cornwall follows the River Tamar from its source near the north Devon coast to the estuary at Plymouth. Dartmoor claims much of the inland area between Plymouth and Exeter in the east.

The website **Discover Devon** (www.discoverdevon.com) has plenty of useful information to get you started.

Getting Around

Contact the **Devon County Public Transport Help Line** (☎ 01392-382800; www.devon.gov.uk/devonbus; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) for information and timetables. It also provides the invaluable *Devon Public Transport Map* and the *Discovery Guide to Dartmoor*.

First Western National (☎ 01271-376524; www.firstgroup.com) serves most of north Devon and much of the south and east, including most Dartmoor services.

Stagecoach Devon (☎ 01392-427711; www.stagecoachbus.com) operates mostly local services and buses from Plymouth to Exeter or Totnes. Timetables are available to download from the website. The Day Explorer (adult £5) allows one day's travel on Stagecoach Devon buses, while the Goldrider pass (£18) is valid for a week.

Devon's rail network skirts along the south coast through Exeter and Plymouth to Cornwall. There are picturesque stretches where the line hugs the seashore. Two branch lines run north: the 39-mile Tarka Line from Exeter to Barnstaple, and the 15-mile Tamar Valley Line from Plymouth to Gunnislake. The Devon Day Ranger (£10) allows a day's unlimited travel on Devon trains including Plymouth and the Tamar Valley Line.

EXETER

☎ 01392 / pop 116,393

Though it's often eclipsed by the better-known cities of Bristol and Bath, Exeter is well worth visiting in its own right, with a thriving nightlife, a lively cultural scene and a rich history stretching back 2000 years. Founded by Celts and expanded by the Romans, Exeter grew rich as a trading port during the early Middle Ages, and the city's fortunes were demonstrated by the completion of its glorious Gothic cathedral in the early 15th century. Exeter suffered heavily during the Luftwaffe raids of WWII, although the cathedral close survived relatively intact, and still boasts some fine medieval architecture. It might be old, but Exeter's kept young at heart thanks to a large student crowd and plenty of bars, cafés and clubs, especially around the revitalised dock area.

History

The modern-day city was built on the foundations laid by the Romans, who established Exeter as the administrative capital for the Dumnonii (a Celtic tribe) of Devon and Cornwall around AD 50. The Romans built a fortified wall around the city, which was later improved by Alfred the Great; parts of both the Roman and Saxon walls can still be seen at various points around the modern city. William the Conqueror laid siege to the city in 1067 and took 18 days to break through the walls. He appointed a Norman *seigneur* (feudal lord) to construct a castle, the ruins of which can still be seen in Rougemont and Northernhay Gardens.

Exeter was a major trading port until a weir was built across the river in 1290, halting river traffic. It wasn't until 1563, when the first ship canal in Britain was dug to bypass the weir, that the city began to re-establish itself, especially through the cloth and wool trade.

Orientation

South of the ruined castle, the city centre radiates out from the leafy square around the cathedral; the redeveloped quay is 500m south. There are two main train stations, Central and St David's; most long-distance trains use St David's, a mile northwest of the centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Waterstone's (☎ 218392; 48-49 High St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Main branch of this large chain bookshop.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 08452 777444; Heavitree Rd; 🕒 24hr)
Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (☎ 411611; Barrack Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Exeter Library (☎ 384201; Castle St; per hr £3; 🕒 9.30am-7pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat, 11am-2.30pm Sun)

LAUNDRY

Silverspin (12 Blackboy Rd; 🕒 8am-10pm)
Soaps (Isambard Pde; per load £3.50-6; 🕒 8.15am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 9.15am-5.45pm Sun) Beside St David's train station.

MEDIA

The *List* is a free magazine detailing events, listings and bars and restaurants in the Exeter area.

POST

Main branch (☎ 223344; Bedford Rd; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Quay House Interpretation & Visitor Centre (☎ 265213; The Quay; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm weekends only Nov-Easter) Offers tourist information and displays on the quay's history.
Tourist office (☎ 265700; tic@exeter.gov.uk; Paris St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights

EXETER CATHEDRAL

At the heart of the city is the magnificent **Cathedral Church of St Peter** (☎ 255573; www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk; The Close; suggested donation £3; 🕒 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-5pm Sat, 8am-7.30pm Sun), which has stood largely unchanged for the last 600 years, despite some WWII bomb damage. Built within a fairly short time span, it's one of the most graceful of England's cathedrals, with celebrated features including the 14th-century stained glass of the East Window, the West Window and the largest section of Gothic rib-vaulting in the world.

The impressive **Great West Front** boasts the largest collection of 14th-century sculpture in England. Inside, the carved **Pulpitum Screen**, completed in 1325, features some marvellous 17th-century ecclesiastical paintings. Behind is the choir, decorated with fine 13th- and 14th-century misericords, including one of an elephant given to King Henry III by Louis IX of France. Nearby, the huge oak canopy over the **Bishop's Throne** was carved in 1312, and the **minstrels' gallery** (1350) is decorated with 12 angels playing musical instruments.

Excellent 45-minute free guided tours run at 11am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday, 11am on Saturday and 4pm on Sunday, April to October. Extra tours are available in summer. It's also worth attending a service: evensong is at 5.30pm Monday to Friday and 3pm on Sunday.

UNDERGROUND PASSAGES

The medieval maintenance passages built to house the lead pipes that once brought fresh water to the city still survive under Exeter's streets. At the time of research they were closed due to the redevelopment of the Princesshay shopping centre, but are scheduled to reopen sometime in 2007.

ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Exeter's multipurpose **museum** (☎ 665858; Queen St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a little bit of everything, ranging from Roman-era artefacts dug up around the city to excellent ethnographic displays from across the globe (look out for some spooky African masks and an impressive suit of samurai armour).

Tours

Volunteer Exeter 'Redcoats' provide free guided tours leaving from the Royal Clarence Hotel or Quay House Visitor Centre several times daily. Themes range from the city's Roman architecture to its 'forgotten past'; hardy souls can even brave a ghosts and legends tour. Contact the tourist office on ☎ 265203 or tic@exeter.gov.uk for details.

Sleeping

BUDGET

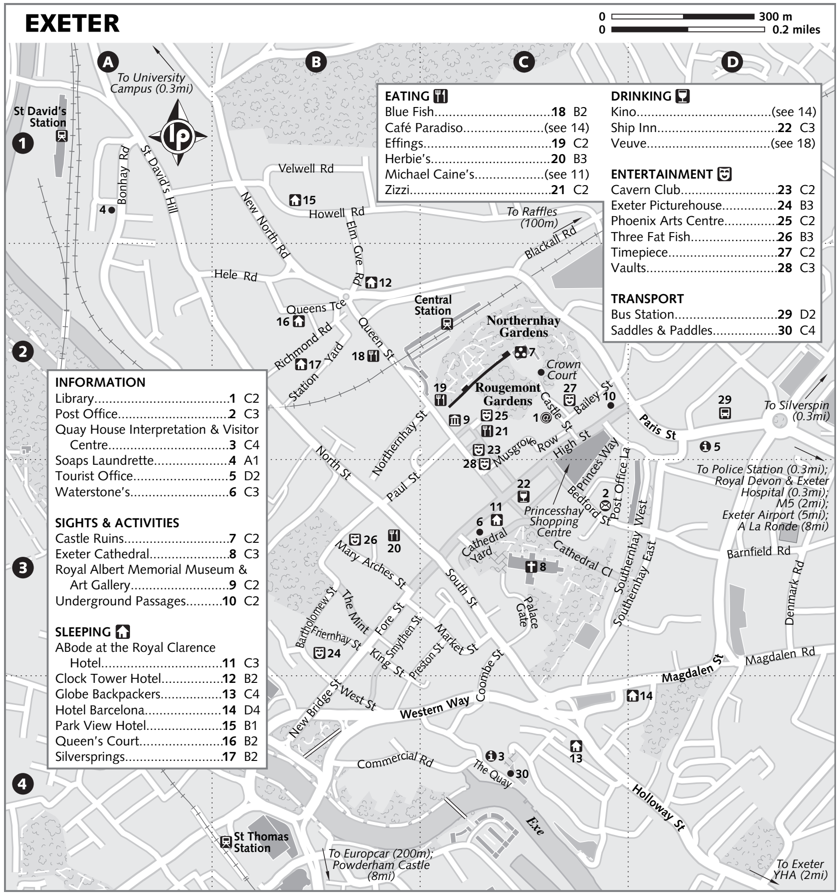
Exeter YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5826; exeter@yha.org.uk; 47 Countess Wear Rd; dm £15.50; 💻) Some 2 miles southeast towards Topsham, the city's official hostel is in a spacious 17th-century house overlooking the River Exe. The facilities are good and the dorms are reasonably sized, but the out-of-town location is a drawback. Catch bus K or T from High St, or 57 or 85 from the bus station to School Lane and follow the signs.

Globe Backpackers (☎ 215521; www.exeterbackpackers.co.uk; 71 Holloway St; dm £14, 7th night free, d £35; 💻) This centrally located and slightly chaotic hostel is housed inside a 17th-century grand manor house near the quay. It's spotlessly clean and run by a friendly husband-and-wife team, but there's only one double room, so plan ahead.

MIDRANGE

Raffles (☎ 270200; www.raffles-exeter.co.uk; 11 Blackall Rd; s/d from £38/60; Ⓟ 🚭) Victorian fixtures and fittings and an antique-heavy atmosphere make this classically English B&B one of the top B&B options in the city. All the rooms are spacious and pleasantly furnished with framed prints and flowery bedspreads; the best have their own bay windows.

EXETER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To University Campus (0.3mi)
St David's Station
Bonhay Rd
St David's Hill
Velwell Rd
New North Rd
Howell Rd
Elm Gve Rd
Hele Rd
Queens Tce
Richmond Rd
Station Yard
Queen St
Central Station
Northernhay Gardens
Crown Court
Rougemont Gardens
Castle St
Bailey St
To Raffles (100m)
Blackall Rd
To Silverspin (0.3mi)
Paris St
North St
Northernhay St
Musgrove Row
High St
Princes Way
Bedford St
Post Office La
Paul St
Princesshay Shopping Centre
Cathedral Yard
Cathedral Cl
Southernhay West
Southernhay East
To Police Station (0.3mi); Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (0.3mi); M5 (2mi); Exeter Airport (5mi); A La Ronde (8mi)
Barnfield Rd
Denmark Rd
Mary Arches St
Bartholomew St
Friernhay St
The Mint
Fore St
King St
Smythen St
Preston St
Market St
South St
Palace Gate
Magdalen St
Magdalen Rd
Coombe St
Western Way
New Bridge St
West St
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The Quay
Exe
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Exeter Picturehouse	24	B3
Phoenix Arts Centre	25	C2
Three Fat Fish	26	B3
Timepiece	27	C2
Vaults	28	C3

TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	29	D2
Saddles & Paddles	30	C4

Clock Tower Hotel (☎ 424545; www.clocktowerhotel.co.uk; 16 New North Rd; s £45, d £50-70; P 🚭) This excellent-value city-style B&B makes a good midrange base, though the rooms are a little on the anonymous side and there are several flights of stairs to negotiate if you're on the upper floors.

Silversprings (☎ 494040; www.silversprings.co.uk; 12 Richmond Rd; s £45, d £70-75, ste £100; 🚭) Styling itself as a Georgian town-house hotel, this is really just a plush B&B in disguise. The 10 rooms are comfortable if a little heavy on the floral décor, and all have spacious en suite bathrooms; little touches like fluffy bathrobes and complimentary herbal teas are very welcome. There's also a self-contained cottage suite with its own kitchen and lounge.

Queen's Court (☎ 272709; www.queenscourt-hotel.co.uk; 6-8 Bystock Tce; s £77-87, d £93-103; 🚭) This large gabled hotel on a quiet terrace off the main road offers a selection of contemporary-styled bedrooms with large bed-backs, multicoloured furniture, and Roberts radios and power showers in every room.

Also recommended:

Park View Hotel (☎ 271772; www.parkviewhotel.freeserve.co.uk; 8 Howell Rd; s £26-40, d £48-60; P 🚭) Grade-II listed Georgian house decked out in heritage style.

TOP END

our pick **Hotel Barcelona** (☎ 281000; barcelona@aliashotels.com; Magdalen St; s £90, d £105-125; P 🚭) Ever fancied staying inside a movie set? Then the delightfully decadent Barcelona is for you. The city's former Eye Infirmary has been renovated with enormous imagination and a playful retro aesthetic. You'll find cinematic prints, '60s furniture and reclaimed wheelchairs dotted around the foyer and downstairs lounge, and the bedrooms are kitted out with an eclectic mishmash of gilt mirrors, wonky wardrobes and Cubist bedspreads. It's fresh, funky and great fun – the kind of place that turns an overnight stay into an event in itself.

ABode at the Royal Clarence Hotel (☎ 319955; www.abodehotels.co.uk/exeter; Cathedral Yard; r £125-225) Keen not to be outdone by the Alias crowd, Exeter's oldest hotel has recently reinvented itself as a boutique beauty. The old-fashioned rooms have been transformed into four categories of varying luxury, ranging from 'comfortable' to 'fabulous'; flat-screen TVs, sleek furniture and huge beds are standard throughout, but it's worth splashing out on the lovely cathedral-view rooms if you can.

Eating

Café Paradiso (☎ 281000; Magdalen St; lunch £5-8, dinner mains from £12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Sheltered under a soaring canopy, the in-house restaurant at Hotel Barcelona is furnished in typically unusual style, with an all-white interior offset by technicoloured panels and painted bicycles. Café food and gourmet sandwiches are served by day, followed by a sophisticated brasserie menu by night.

Herbies (☎ 258473; 15 North St; mains £5-8; 🕑 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) A long-standing favourite with Exeter's veggie crowd, serving up homemade cashew nut loaf, butternut squash risotto and huge curries in a homely, sun-filled dining room.

Zizzi (☎ 274737; 21/22 Gandy St; mains £6-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This excellent Italian-influenced brasserie is fantastic value, serving up huge pizzas and pasta dishes in the swish, high-ceilinged dining room or a suntrap garden terrace.

Blue Fish (☎ 493581; 44 Queen St; mains £12-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Look no further for fresh seafood than the Blue Fish, the newly-opened Exeter outpost of an original restaurant in St Ives. Expect the same top-quality fish dishes and a similarly laid-back, quasi-continental atmosphere. For a post-dinner tipple, try the chic Veuve cellar bar downstairs.

Michael Caine's (☎ 310031; www.michaelcaines.com; Cathedral Yard; mains from £18.50-25) Exeter's resident celebrity chef continues to work wonders at his flagship restaurant, recently given a thorough make-over as part of the refurbishment of the Royal Clarence Hotel. The décor's all gleaming mirrors, crisp tablecloths and smoke-coloured seats, and the cooking is as creative as ever.

Effings (☎ 211888; 74 Queen St; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, dinner from 7pm Fri & Sat) This new delicatessen is an Aladdin's cave for picnickers, with a mouthwatering selection of Italian meats, local cheeses, freshly-made quiches and sticky tarts; there's also a pleasant café that opens on Friday and Saturday for regionally themed dinners.

Drinking

Ship Inn (☎ 272040; Martin's Lane) Tucked away along a side street off the main cathedral square, this cramped old tavern is said to have been Francis Drake's favourite boozer, and it's still popular with Exeter's ale-drinking crowd.

Kino (Magdalen St; members & guests only after 10pm) This cinematic cellar bar would be more at home on New York's Lower East Side than central Exeter. Expect handmade cocktails, a Chinese-baroque ambience and regular comedy and club nights.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Three Fat Fish (☎ 424628; www.threefatfish.co.uk; 1 Mary Arches St) A popular bar and late-night venue, hosting a mix of gigs, comedians, music nights and DJs.

Cavern Club (☎ 495370; www.cavernclub.co.uk; 83-84 Queen St) The top venue for live gigs in Exeter, attracting big-name DJs and breaking acts from the indie and underground scene.

Timepiece (☎ 493096; www.timepiecenightclub.co.uk; Lt Castle St) Arguably the best club in town, with a revolving programme of urban, garage, drum'n'bass and indie nights.

Exeter's other clubs include the **Vaults** (☎ 203939; 8 Gandy St), a lively basement bar along Gandy St, and a knot of cheesy nightclubs across the river from the quayside.

THEATRES & CINEMAS

Phoenix Arts Centre (☎ 667080; www.exeterphoenix.org.uk; Gandy St) An excellent arts complex hosting dance, theatre, films, DJs and live music. The café-bar's pretty hip, too.

Exeter Picturehouse (☎ 435522; Bartholomew St West) Screens a mix of mainstream and arthouse flicks.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Scheduled services connect **Exeter International Airport** (☎ 367433; www.exeter-airport.co.uk) with several UK cities including Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as the Channel Islands and the Isles of Scilly. There are also regular flights to various European destinations. The budget carrier **Flybe** (www.flybe.com) operates many of the most popular routes.

BUS

The most useful local bus is the X38, which runs to Plymouth (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Sunday). The X9 runs to Bude (three hours, eight daily, two on Sunday) via Okehampton; for most other destinations the train is faster and more reliable.

TRAIN

The fastest trains between London and Exeter St David's use Paddington station and take around 2½ hours (£45.40, hourly). There are also half-hourly connections with Bristol (£17.60, 1¼ hours) and Penzance (£28.40, three hours).

The picturesque Tarka Line between Exeter Central and Barnstaple (£10.80, 1¼ hours, every hour Monday to Saturday, four to six on Sunday) follows the valleys of the Rivers Yeo and Taw and gives good country views.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 5 miles east of the centre, off the A30. Buses 56 and 379 run to the airport from the bus station (20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

BICYCLES & CANOES

Saddles & Paddles (☎ 424241; www.sadpad.com; 4 Kings Wharf, The Quay) on the quayside rents out bikes (adult per day £14) and canoes (single kayaks per hour/day £7/18).

BUS

Exeter is well served by public transport. The one-day Dayrider pass (£4) gives unlimited transport on Stagecoach's Exeter buses. Bus N links St David's and Central train stations and passes near the bus station.

CAR

The tourist office provides a list of car-hire offices; try **Europcar** (☎ 275398; Water Lane).

There are several large city-centre car parks, but if you'd rather not drive into the city, there are Park & Ride schemes from car parks at Sowton (Bus PR4), Matford (Bus PR5), Digby Rd (Bus PR3) and Honiton Rd (PR2). Connecting buses travel to the city centre every 10 minutes.

TAXI

There are taxi ranks outside the train stations. Alternatively, try **A1 Cars** (☎ 218888) or **Capital Taxis** (☎ 433433).

AROUND EXETER

Powderham Castle

Powderham (☎ 01626-890243; www.powderham.co.uk; admission £7.95; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) has been the ancestral home of the Courtenay family for over 600 years. Built in 1391, and extensively modified following damage caused during the Civil War, the castle contains some of the best-preserved Stuart and Regency furniture of any of Britain's stately homes. Guided tours also take in the Great Hall and State Rooms.

Powderham is on the River Exe in Kenton, 8 miles south of Exeter. Bus 85A runs from Exeter (20 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, every 30 minutes Sunday).

À la Ronde

Having returned from their European Grand Tour, sisters Jane and Mary Parminter planned to combine the magnificence of the Church of San Vitale, which they'd visited in Ravenna, Italy, with the homeliness of a country cottage. The result, completed around 1796, is an intriguing 16-sided **house** (NT; ☎ 01395-265514; Summer Lane, Exmouth; admission £5; 🕑 11am-5.30pm Sun-Thu Mar-Oct) with bizarre interior décor that includes a shell-encrusted room, a frieze of feathers, and sand and seaweed collages.

It's 2 miles north of Exmouth on the A376; Stagecoach Devon bus 57 runs close by en route to Exeter (30 minutes, at least every 30 minutes).

SOUTH DEVON COAST

Torquay & Paignton

☎ 01803 / pop 110,370

If you thought the British seaside holiday was dead, then think again; it's alive and well along the stretch of coastline between Torquay, Paignton and Brixham collectively known as the English Riviera. Despite the name, this is a long way from St Tropez, but the region does have its peculiar charms – especially if you've got a soft spot for amusement arcades, deckchairs and good old-fashioned fish and chips. Queen of the coastline is grand old Torquay, where the Victorian villas and chintzy hotels are stacked up like dominoes above the bay. Just to the west of Torquay is Paignton, the picture of an English seaside resort, complete with a seafront promenade, multicoloured beach-huts and a faded 19th-century pier.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 70 70 010; torbay.tic@torbay.gov.uk; Vaughan Pde; 🕑 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4.30pm Sun May-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) sells discounted tickets to local attractions.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Torquay has two famous residents: Agatha Christie, who was born in Torquay in 1890 and lived for many years at the manor house of Greenaway, just outside town; and Basil Fawlty, the deranged Torquay hotelier memorably played by John Cleese in the classic British sitcom *Fawlty Towers*.

Torquay Museum (☎ 293975; 529 Babbacombe Rd; admission £3; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 1.30-5pm Sun Oct-Apr, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-4pm Sat May-Sep) has an intriguing selection of Agatha memorabilia, including family photos, first edition novels and a couple of display cases devoted to her famous detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.

Regular boat trips sail along the coastline from Torquay to Dartmouth (£14) and Brixham (£5). Contact **Torbay Belle Cruises** (☎ 528555) or **Western Lady Cruises** (☎ 842424) or just pitch up on the pier.

Torquay is surrounded by pleasant beaches, the best of which is family-friendly **Babbacombe**, about 2 miles north of the centre, which still has a working **funicular** (☎ 328750; 🕑 9.30am-6pm) connecting the beach to the clifftop.

SLEEPING

You won't have any trouble finding somewhere to sleep in Torquay – the town is practically wall-to-wall B&Bs and hotels, with a concentrated cluster around Avenue Rd and Bridge Rd.

Torquay International Backpackers (☎ 299924; jane@torquaybackpackers.co.uk; 119 Abbey Rd; per person dm/d winter £10/12, summer £12/14) This small hostel is in the middle of a row of Victorian terraced houses, and makes a friendly base in Torquay. The owner, Jane, is full of useful local info and often organises summer barbecues, beach trips and local pub tours.

Norwood Hotel (☎ 294236; www.norwoodhotel torquay.co.uk; 60 Belgrave Rd; d £44-50; 🚭) In the heart of Torquay's B&B ghetto, the Norwood stands head and shoulders above its neighbours. The frill-heavy, Victoriana bedrooms might not be to everyone's taste, but they're fantastic value and handily placed for exploring the rest of Torquay.

Everglades Hotel (☎ 295389; www.evergladeshotel.co.uk; 32 St Marychurch Rd; d £54-56; 🅿 🚭) This is a detached hotel with an elevated sundeck and modern sea-view rooms.

English House (☎ 328760; Teignmouth Rd, Maidencombe; d £70-90) This is a surprisingly stylish B&B-cum-restaurant in the suburb of Maidencombe, with delightful upstairs rooms decorated in warm tones and gingham checks. The breakfast menu includes Luscombe sausages, grapefruit and toasted muffins.

Hillcroft (☎ 297247; www.thehillcroft.co.uk; 9 St Lukes Rd; d £75-130) Not what you'd expect to find in Torquay – a semiboutique hotel kitted out with Indonesian furniture, Balinese furnishings and Tuscan tiling, with individually styled rooms ranging from a four-poster Indian suite to a chic Provençal penthouse.

EATING

Pier Point (☎ 299935; Seafront; mains £5-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Next to the Princess Theatre, this breezy bistro-bar is the best bet for lunch or a light supper in Torquay, with crispy pizzas, fresh salads and seafood and an extensive selection of wines, cocktails and cold beers.

English House (☎ 328760; Teignmouth Rd, Maidencombe; 2/3 courses £26/30; 🕑 dinner) Locally sourced Devonian ingredients underpin the monthly changing menu at this award-winning restaurant, from Brixham mussels and monkfish to slow-roasted Devon lamb and asparagus.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The X80 travels every half-hour from Torquay to Paignton (20 minutes), Totnes (one hour) and Plymouth (two hours 10 minutes). Bus 111 travels to Dartmouth (1¾ hours, hourly, Monday to Saturday) via Totnes.

A branch train line runs from Exeter via Torquay (45 minutes) to Paignton (50 minutes). The **Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway** (☎ 555872; www.paignton-steamrailway.co.uk) runs from Paignton on the scenic 7-mile trip to Kingswear on the River Dart, linked by ferry (six minutes) to Dartmouth; a combined ticket costs £9 return per adult. You can add on a river cruise

(£14) or a Round Robin boat trip to Totnes and back to Paignton by bus (£14.50).

Brixham

☎ 01803 / pop 17,460

On the opposite side of the bay from Torquay, the old fishing town of Brixham has built its fortunes on the fruits of the sea, and remains one of the country's busiest harbours. Pastel-shaded fishermen's cottages and old warehouses surround the harbourside and spill over onto the nearby cliffs, but this is far from a neatly packaged tourist resort; Brixham has a rough, gritty charm entirely absent from the other Torbay towns.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0906-680126; brixham.tic@torbay.org.uk; Old Market House, The Quay; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) is right beside the harbour.

Brixham Heritage Museum (☎ 856267; www.brixhamheritage.org.uk; Bolton Cross; admission £1.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) has a range of displays exploring the town's history and its connection to the sea, with exhibits on smuggling, the Brixham lifeboat and some unusual items dragged up by local fishing trawlers.

Anchored in the harbour is a replica of the **Golden Hind** (☎ 856223; admission £3; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mar-Sep), Drake's surprisingly small globe-circling ship.

There are plenty of chippies scattered around the quay, but for a real taste of the British seaside you can't beat a pot of prawns or fresh crab from one of the seafood booths on the harbourside; the best is **Browse Seafoods** (☎ 882484), next to the tourist office.

Bus 22 runs along the coast to Kingswear (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday), from where you can catch buses to Torquay or the river ferry over to Dartmouth.

Dartmouth

☎ 01803 / pop 5693

The pretty riverside town of Dartmouth has long been known as the location for Britain's largest naval college, but in recent years it's also established itself as a favourite seaside escape for city types fleeing the rat race. There are some surprisingly chic shops and boutiques dotted around town, not to mention an astonishing concentration of upmarket restaurants – in high summer it's all a bit Knightsbridge by the sea, with posh yachts jostling for space in the small riverside harbour and plenty of impeccably coiffured ladies doing lunch at one of the town's streetside cafés.

The **tourist office** (☎ 834224; www.discoverdartmouth.com; Mayor's Ave; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Oct) houses the Newcomen Engine, an early (1712) steam engine.

Perched on a promontory at the entrance to the Dart Estuary, **Dartmouth Castle** (EH; ☎ 833588; admission £3.70; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) was constructed to protect the harbour from seaborne raids in conjunction with its companion castle at Kingswear. There's a ferry along the estuary to the castle, three-quarters of a mile outside the town, from South Embankment every 15 minutes from 10am to 4.45pm (adult one way £1.20).

The **Dartmouth Museum** (☎ 832923; Duke St; admission £1.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) displays a jumbled collection of costumes, swords, ships-in-bottles and vintage toys. The museum stands at the end of the **Butterwalk**, a row of super-wonky timber-framed houses that look as though they could collapse at any moment; incredibly, they've somehow managed to remain standing since the late 17th century.

Dartmouth is justifiably proud of its spanking new arts centre, the **Flavel** (☎ 839530; www.theflavel.org.uk), which hosts small-scale theatre and dance, as well as live music and films.

SLEEPING

Hill View House (☎ 839372; www.hillviewdartmouth.co.uk; 76 Victoria Rd; d £56-82; ☒) A short walk uphill from the harbour, this tasteful B&B wears its environmental credentials on its sleeve: eco-friendly toiletries, long-life light bulbs and organic breakfasts are all *de rigueur*, and though some of the rooms are on the small side, you couldn't ask for a friendlier night's sleep.

our pick **Brown's Hotel** (☎ 832572; www.brownshoteldartmouth.co.uk; 29 Victoria Rd; s £60, d £80-165; ☒) This effortlessly elegant hotel has built up a reputation as one of the top seaside retreats in Devon, and it certainly brings a touch of Chelsea class to Dartmouth's streets. The contemporary rooms are decorated in pale tones of chocolate and cappuccino, offset by the odd zebra print or piece of designer furniture. Downstairs there's a top-notch British restaurant serving Devon lamb and local shellfish, and to top it off you can kick back in the super-sleek bar next door, complete with comfy sofas, board games and an imaginative tapas menu.

Orleans Guest House (☎ 835450; www.orleans-guesthouse-dartmouth.co.uk; 24 South Town; d £80-85, ste £150; ☒) Another beautifully designed B&B in a 17th-century Georgian town house, with three rooms finished in varying shades of red, gold or mauve, with Egyptian cotton bedspreads and DVD players in every room.

EATING & DRINKING

Café Alf Resco (☎ 835880; Lower St; mains from £6; 🕒 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Despite its notoriously erratic opening hours, this wonderful little bistro blends the best elements of a Tuscan trattoria with a Parisian street-side café. Rickety wooden chairs and old street signs are scattered around the front terrace, which makes a great place for a frothy latte or ciabatta sandwich.

RB's Diner (☎ 832882; 33 Lower St; mains £15-18; 🕒 dinner) Padded chairs, stripped pine floors and gleaming wineglasses tell you all you need to know about this refined restaurant, where the food is more South Kensington than south Devon – tenderloin of pork, beef fillet and lemon mousse with raspberries are some of the treats in store.

New Angel (☎ 839425; 2 South Embankment; mains £18-23; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun) Run by celebrity TV chef John Burton Race, this modern British bistro is the proud owner of a Michelin star, so you'll have to book well ahead for a table; but the top-level cooking is more than worth the effort.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 93 runs to Plymouth (two hours, hourly, four on Sunday) and bus 111 runs to Torquay (1¾ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) via Totnes. There are regular ferries across the river from Kingswear (car/pedestrian £3.30/1) every six minutes.

River Link (☎ 834488; www.riverlink.co.uk; return £8.50; 🕒 Apr-Oct) operates cruises along the River Dart from Totnes.

For details of the popular Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway, see p301.

Totnes

☎ 01803 / pop 8194

The delightful little town of Totnes has been something of a hippy haven since the 1960s, and its artistic connections continue thanks to the nearby Dartington College of Arts, a couple of miles up the road from the town. But the history of Totnes stretches back much further than the summer of love; a well-preserved Norman keep stands guard on a hilltop above town, and the main street is lined with elegant Tudor and Elizabethan buildings that hint at Totnes' history as a mercantile town. In fact, tiny Totnes has a higher percentage of listed buildings than anywhere in Britain.

The **tourist office** (☎ 863168; www.totnesinformation.co.uk; Coronation Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in the town's old mill.

SIGHTS

Totnes Elizabethan Museum (☎ 863821; 70 Fore St; admission £1.50; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct) is in a house dating from 1575 and still retains many Tudor and Elizabethan features. Its displays explore the history of Totnes, and there's a room dedicated to the mathematician Charles Babbage, father of the modern computer.

The **Devonshire Collection of Period Costume** (☎ 863168; High St; admission £2; 🕒 11am-5pm Mon-Fri May-Sep) features annually changing selections from the extensive costume collection, one of the finest in Britain.

Totnes Castle (EH; ☎ 864406; admission £2.40; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) occupies a commanding position on a grassy hilltop above town. Little remains of the original Norman motte-and-bailey fortress, but the outer keep is still standing, and the views of the town and surrounding fields are fantastic.

SLEEPING

Dartington YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5788; dm £12; 🕒 mid-Apr–Oct) This small hostel is located inside a 16th-century riverside cottage, complete with original features including a log-burning stove. It's 2 miles northwest of Totnes off the A385; bus X80 stops nearby at Shinners Bridge half a mile away.

Old Forge (☎ 862174; www.oldforgetotnes.com; Seymour Pl; s £46-53, d £60-71; 🅿 ☒) As its name suggests, this lovely B&B once housed workshops for the nearby castle of Berry Pomeroy, but it's now been converted to provide delightful country rooms equipped with huge, soft beds and plush pillows. There's a peaceful garden beside the breakfast room, and an original lock-up once used to incarcerate local miscreants.

Steam Packet Inn (☎ 863880; www.steampacketinn.co.uk; St Peters Quay; d £79.50; 🅿 ☒) A historic pub a little way along the river from town, with four pleasant bedrooms equipped with understated furniture, flat-screen TVs and tranquil river views.

EATING

Wills (☎ 0800 056 3006; 3 The Plains; 🕑 lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat) Posh nosh served in a two-floored restaurant at the bottom of Fore St. Illy coffee, sticky tarts and light lunches are served in the downstairs café; upstairs the atmosphere is more refined, with elegant Regency style furniture and food to match.

Willow Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 862605; 87 High St; mains £4-5.50; 🕑 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed, Fri & Sat) The hang-out of choice for Totnes' new agers, this rustic wholefood café does a nice line in couscous, quiches, hotpots and homemade cakes during the day, served in a sunny dining room packed with pine tables, potted plants and free newspapers. Dinner's served three nights a week and there's live music at weekends.

Rumours (☎ 864682; 30 Fore St; mains £10.50-14; 🕑 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 6-10.30pm Sun) This venerable restaurant is so friendly it's almost like eating out in a friend's front room. Photographs and artwork cover the walls, and the menu's stuffed with everything from pizzas to pan-fried sea trout and Salcombe ice cream.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus X64 runs to Exeter (one hour, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and bus X80 goes to Plymouth (1¼ hours, hourly). Bus 200 travels to Paignton (hourly, 30 minutes) and Torquay (50 minutes).

Frequent trains run to Exeter (£7.80, 45 minutes) and Plymouth (£5.70, 30 minutes, hourly). The train station is half a mile from the centre.

A short walk from Totnes main-line train station, steam trains of the private **South Devon Railway** (☎ 0845 345 1420; www.southdevonrailway.org) run to Buckfastleigh (adult return £8.80, four or five daily Easter to October) on the edge of Dartmoor.

There are cruises on the river with frequent departures to Dartmouth from April to October (p303).

PLYMOUTH

☎ 01752 / pop 256,633

Britain is historically a nation of seafarers, and nowhere is this maritime heritage more obvious than at the port of Plymouth, from where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail for the New World and Sir Francis Drake allegedly eyed up the Spanish Armada while indulging in a spot of bowls. The best place to view old Plymouth is the much-restored Barbican area, where half-timbered houses and Tudor buildings look out across a harbour filled with fishing trawlers and upmarket yachts; sadly the rest of Plymouth was practically levelled by bombing raids during WWII, and was largely rebuilt in functional concrete after the war. But the city's slowly smartening up its act, with a new shopping development in the city centre, a growing selection of bars and restaurants around the Barbican, and the reopening of one of the city's best-loved landmarks, the Tinside Lido, in 2003.

History

The city's position at the mouth of the Plym and Tamar estuaries made it an ideal location for a naval base. During the 15th and 16th centuries, most of the British naval fleet was stationed here; the royal dockyard was established at Devonport beside the River Tamar in 1690 and remains an important naval base.

The globetrotting hero Sir Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth in 1577 aboard the *Golden Hind*. Eleven years later, Drake played a major part in the defeat of the Spanish Armada, chasing the Spanish fleet all the way to Calais and then attacking them with fire ships. Many of the Spanish vessels escaped but were wrecked off the Scottish coast. Total losses: England nil, Spain 51.

Orientation

Plymouth has three main sections. The pedestrianised centre is south of the train station and contains the city's main shopping streets. Further south is the headland Hoe area, packed with guesthouses and B&Bs, and east of the Hoe is the regenerated Barbican area, where you'll find the best places to eat and drink.

Information

Hoegate Laundromat (☎ 223031; 55 Notte St; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)
Plymouth Internet Café (☎ 221777; 32 Frankfort Gate; per hr £5; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)
Police station (Charles Cross; 🕑 24hr)
Tourist office (☎ 306330; www.visitplymouth.co.uk; 3-5 The Barbican; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) Housed inside the Plymouth Mayflower building.
University Bookseller (☎ 660428; 42 Drake Circus; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
West Hoe Laundrette (☎ 667373; 1 Pier St; 🕑 9.15am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Sights & Activities

PLYMOUTH HOE

Francis Drake supposedly spied the Spanish fleet from this grassy headland overlooking Plymouth Sound; the fabled bowling green on which he finished his game was probably where his statue now stands. Later the Hoe became a favoured holiday spot for the Victorian aristocracy, and the headland is backed by an impressive array of multistoreyed villas and once-grand hotels.

The red-and-white-striped lighthouse of **Smeaton's Tower** (The Hoe; admission £2.25; 🕑 10am-4pm daily Apr-Oct, Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) was built on the Eddystone Rocks in 1759, then rebuilt on the Hoe in 1882 when it was replaced by a larger lighthouse. You can climb the 93 steps for great views and an insight into the history of the Eddystone lighthouses.

Plymouth Dome (☎ 603300; The Hoe; admission £4.75; 🕑 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) provides an entertaining romp through Plymouth's history, using models and audiovisual shows to explore subjects including Elizabethan life in Plymouth, the Luftwaffe raids and the construction of the Eddystone lighthouses.

BARBICAN

To get an idea of what old Plymouth was like before the Luftwaffe redesigned it, head for the Barbican, with its many Tudor and Jacobean buildings (now converted into galleries, craft shops and restaurants).

The Pilgrim Fathers' *Mayflower* set sail for America from the Barbican on 16 September 1620. At the **Mayflower Steps** a plaque lists the passengers and marks the point of departure. Another famous voyage was led by Captain James Cook, who set out from the Barbican in 1768 in search of a southern continent.

Plymouth Mayflower (☎ 306330; 3-5 The Barbican; admission £4; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is another hi-tech rundown through Plymouth's nautical heritage, providing the background to the Pilgrim Fathers' trip with plenty of interactive gizmos and multisensory displays.

The **Elizabethan House** (☎ 304774; 32 New St; admission £1.25; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Nov) is the former residence of an Elizabethan sea captain, housing 16th-century furniture and other period artefacts.

Across the harbour from the Barbican and reached by a footbridge, the **National Marine Aquarium** (☎ 220084; The Barbican; www.national-aquarium.co.uk; admission £8.75; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is one of the country's top aquariums. The various tanks re-create marine life in a variety of habitats, including coral seas, an Atlantic reef and the deep ocean.

MERCHANT'S HOUSE

Between the Barbican and the centre is the 17th-century **Merchant's House** (☎ 304774; 33 St Andrews St; admission £1.25; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Tue-Fri & 10am-5pm Sat year-round, closed 1-2pm Apr-Oct), a Jacobean building featuring models, pictures, local curiosities (including manacles and truncheons) and replicas of a Victorian school room and apothecary's shop.

CITY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Near the university is the **City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 304774; Drake Circus; admission free; 🕑 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), hosting collections of local history, porcelain and naval art. The Cottonian Collection includes some significant paintings, prints and etchings by artists including Joshua Reynolds.

BOAT TRIPS

Several boat operators offer cruises from the Barbican to the dockyards and warships (adult return £5), and four-hour cruises up the River Tamar (adult return £7.50) to Calstock. Contact **Plymouth Boat Cruises** (☎ 822797) or **Tamar Cruising** (☎ 822105), both on Phoenix Wharf.

Sleeping

Most of Plymouth's B&Bs are concentrated around the Hoe, especially along Citadel Rd.

Jewell's Hotel (☎ 254760; 220 Citadel Rd; s £25, d £35-55; ☒) This excellent B&B just off the Hoe has a number of tastefully finished rooms spread out over several floors, including some with original Victorian fireplaces and cast-iron beds.

Ashgrove Hotel (☎ 664046; www.ashgrovehotel-plymouth.co.uk; 218 Citadel Rd; s/d £30/40) A simpler option next door to Jewell's, with interior décor that's taken straight from the pages of the British B&B catalogue (think lacy beds, flowery curtains and pine furniture).

Four Seasons Guest House (☎ 223591; www.fourseasonsguesthouse.co.uk; 207 Citadel Rd East; s £30-45, d £45-60; ☒) Slightly further down the hill towards the Barbican, in a small terrace of Victorian houses, this lovely B&B has standard and deluxe rooms all decorated in relaxing shades of mustard and cream, but the highlight is the fantastic breakfast, which includes Scotch pancakes, organic yoghurt and local bacon.

Bowling Green Hotel (☎ 209090; www.bowlinggreenhotel.co.uk; 9-10 Osborne Pl; d from £60; P 🚭) Ignore the unedifying pebble-dash front – the bedrooms at this five-diamond B&B are some of the nicest in the Hoe, with a welcome absence of floral prints, and views right across Francis' famous bowling green.

Duke of Cornwall Hotel (☎ 275850; www.thedukeofcornwallhotel.com; Millbay Rd; s £94, d £104-160) With one of the most striking edifices in Plymouth, a grand turret-topped pile dotted with balconies and Gothic gables, this is undoubtedly the most luxurious place to stay in town. The rooms are massive, if a touch old-fashioned; if you can afford it the four-poster suite, complete with champagne and complimentary fruit basket, is definitely the one to choose.

Other recommendations:

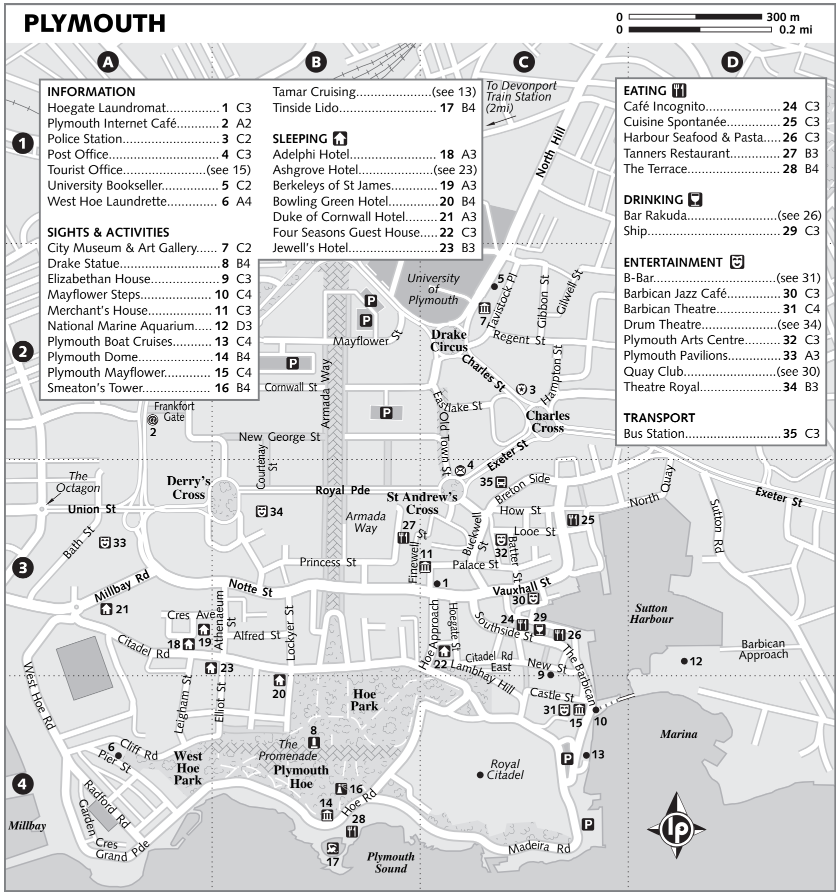
Berkeleys of St James (☎ 221654; www.onthehoe.co.uk; 4 St James Pl East; s £35, d £50-55; 🚭) Reliable B&B distinguished by its organic breakfasts.

Adelphi Hotel (☎ 225520; 59 Citadel Rd; s/d £40/50; P 🚭) Old sea-captain's residence with a guest lounge and bog-standard B&B rooms.

Eating

Terrace (☎ 603533; Madeira Rd; lunch £3-6; 🕑 breakfast & lunch) Tucked away beside the Tinside Lido, this bright and breezy café has the best location of any eatery in town, with sweeping views across Plymouth Sound and a selection of sandwiches, coffees and generous jacket potatoes.

Café Incognito (☎ 265999; 92 North Hill; lunch £3-6; 🕑 8am-8pm) If you're after a light bite or an all-day brekkie, head for the sunny Incognito, with a showcase of local art on the walls and all the café classics – baguettes, tortilla wraps and paninis.



PLYMOUTH

INFORMATION		
Hoegate Laundromat	1	C3
Plymouth Internet Café	2	A2
Police Station	3	C2
Post Office	4	C3
Tourist Office	(see 15)	
University Bookseller	5	C2
West Hoe Laundrette	6	A4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
City Museum & Art Gallery	7	C2
Drake Statue	8	B4
Elizabethan House	9	C3
Mayflower Steps	10	C4
Merchant's House	11	C3
National Marine Aquarium	12	D3
Plymouth Boat Cruises	13	C4
Plymouth Dome	14	B4
Plymouth Mayflower	15	C4
Smeaton's Tower	16	B4
Tamar Cruising	(see 13)	
Tinside Lido	17	B4
SLEEPING		
Adelphi Hotel	18	A3
Ashgrove Hotel	(see 23)	
Berkeleys of St James	19	A3
Bowling Green Hotel	20	B4
Duke of Cornwall Hotel	21	A3
Four Seasons Guest House	22	C3
Jewell's Hotel	23	B3
EATING		
Café Incognito	24	C3
Cuisine Spontanée	25	C3
Harbour Seafood & Pasta	26	C3
Tanners Restaurant	27	B3
The Terrace	28	B4
DRINKING		
Bar Rakuda	(see 26)	
Ship	29	C3
ENTERTAINMENT		
B-Bar	(see 31)	
Barbican Jazz Café	30	C3
Barbican Theatre	31	C4
Drum Theatre	(see 34)	
Plymouth Arts Centre	32	C3
Plymouth Pavilions	33	A3
Quay Club	(see 30)	
Theatre Royal	34	B3
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	35	C3

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To Devonport Train Station (2mi)
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University of Plymouth
Tavistock Pl
Gibbon St
Gilwell St
Drake Circus
Regent St
Mayflower St
Charles St
Hampton St
Cornwall St
Armada Way
Eastlake St
Old Town St
Charles Cross
Frankfort Gate
New George St
Exeter St
Courtenay St
The Octagon
Union St
Derry's Cross
Royal Pde
St Andrew's Cross
Breton Side
North Quay
Sutton Rd
How St
Looe St
Bath St
Armada Way
Finewell St
Buckwell St
Batter St
Princess St
Palace St
Notte St
Vauxhall St
Millbay Rd
Cres Ave
Athenaeum St
Alfred St
Lockyer St
Hoe Approach
Hoegate St
Southside St
Sutton Harbour
Citadel Rd
Citadel Rd East
Lambhay Hill
New St
The Barbican
Barbican Approach
West Hoe Rd
Leigham St
Elliot St
Hoe Park
Castle St
Marina
Cliff Rd
Pier St
West Hoe Park
The Promenade
Plymouth Hoe
Royal Citadel
Radford Rd
Garden Cres
Grand Pde
Hoe Rd
Millbay
Plymouth Sound
Madeira Rd

SWIMMING IN STYLE

Downhill from the Hoe is the **Tinside Lido** (☎ 0870 300 0042; 🕑 noon-6pm during school holidays, 10am-6pm May-Sep), an outdoor saltwater pool built in classic Art Deco style, first opened to the public in 1935. During the Lido's heyday in the '40s and '50s, thousands of Plymouthians flocked to the pool on summer days (backed by the soothing strains of a string orchestra), and during the war it made the perfect place to cool off after cleaning up the rubble from the city's bomb-ravaged streets. On one memorable occasion, some 3000 people took to the water in a very un-British display of high spirits. Sadly, package holidays took their toll on the Lido in the '70s and '80s, and the pool fell into disrepair, finally closing in 1992. It's since been restored to its former glory thanks to a hefty £3.4m investment by the city council and local benefactors, and it's packed throughout summer with school kids and sun-worshippers; sadly, though, there's no sign of the string orchestra returning just yet.

Harbour Seafood & Pasta (☎ 260717; 10 Quay Rd; mains £8-16; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A cosy pasta and fish joint with tables out on the quayside or in the small dining room, serving sumptuous pasta and probably the best seafood in the Barbican.

Cuisine Spontanée (☎ 673757; Century Quay; mains £10-18; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The gastronomic equivalent of a mix-and-match sweetshop – choose your ingredients (meat, fish or veg) and an accompanying sauce (Thai, Chinese, Mexican) and watch the chef put them together at your table.

Tanners Restaurant (☎ 252001; www.tannersrestaurant.com; Finewell St; 2-/3-course dinner £24/30; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Housed in the city's oldest building, a merchant's mansion built in 1498, Plymouth's most renowned fine-dining restaurant is run by the Tanner brothers, who've made a name for themselves reinventing classic British and French dishes with their own individual twist.

Drinking

Plymouth has a buzzing nightlife, but the main club strip, Union St, has a reputation for trouble at kicking-out time. The area around the Barbican is wall-to-wall pubs and bars.

Bar Rakuda (☎ 221155; 11 Quay Rd; 🕑 9am-11pm) One of the best quayside bars, ideal for a morning latté, a lunchtime mocha or a cocktail jug when the sun goes down.

Ship (☎ 667604; Quay Rd) Just along the quay, this historical tavern is another popular boozer in the Barbican, with plenty of real ales and pub grub.

Entertainment

BARS & NIGHTCLUBS

Barbican Jazz Café (☎ 672127; 11 The Parade; admission Fri & Sat £2; 🕑 noon-2am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Nightly jazz and guest DJs keep the crowd happy at this barrel-vaulted club beside the quay.

Quay Club (☎ 224144; 11 The Parade; 🕑 10am-2pm) Next door to the Jazz Café, this cavernous club is a favourite with Plymouth's night owls, with drum'n'bass on Monday, jazz and soul on Wednesday and chart and cheese on Friday and Saturday.

B-Bar (☎ 242021; Castle St) The in-house café-bar of the Barbican Theatre, B-Bar hosts live music, DJs, cabaret and comedy.

THEATRES & CINEMAS

Theatre Royal (☎ 267222; www.theatreroyal.com; Royal Pde) Plymouth's main theatre puts on large-scale touring productions, while its Drum Theatre stages fringe plays.

Plymouth Pavilions (☎ 229922; www.plymouthpavilions.com; Millbay Rd) Plymouth's main venue for theatre and comedy, hosting everything from the League of Gentlemen to the Flaming Lips.

Barbican Theatre (☎ 267131; www.barbicantheatre.co.uk; Castle St) An innovative arts theatre with regular dance and theatre, and photographic exhibitions in the downstairs café.

Plymouth Arts Centre (☎ 206114; www.plymouthac.org.uk; 38 Looe St) An excellent indie cinema and gallery, with a recently overhauled veggie restaurant and bar.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Bus X38 runs to Exeter (1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Sunday); bus 82 runs twice daily at weekends to Plymouth via Moretonhampstead, Postbridge and Princetown on

Dartmoor. Bus X80 runs every half-hour to Torquay (1¾ hours) via Totnes (one hour 10 minutes) from Monday to Saturday, and hourly on Sunday.

National Express runs regular coaches to Birmingham (£41, 5½ hours, four daily), Bristol (£24.50, three hours, four daily), London (£27.50, five to six hours, eight daily) and Penzance (£6.50, 3¼ hours, seven daily).

TRAIN

Services run to London (£63, 3½ hours, half-hourly), Bristol (£44, two hours, two or three per hour), Exeter (£11.60, one hour, two or three per hour) and Penzance (£11.60, two hours, half-hourly).

AROUND PLYMOUTH

Buckland Abbey

Originally a Cistercian monastery and 13th-century abbey church, **Buckland Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01822-853607; Yelverton; admission £7; ⏰ 10.30am-5.30pm Fri-Wed mid-Mar–Oct, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Nov–mid-Mar) was transformed into a family residence by Sir Richard Grenville and bought in 1581 by his cousin and nautical rival Sir Francis Drake. Exhibitions on its history feature Drake's Drum, said to beat by itself when Britain is in danger of being invaded. There's also a fine Elizabethan garden.

Buckland is 11 miles north of Plymouth. Take buses 83, 84 or 86 (40 minutes, every 30 minutes) to Yelverton, then bus 55 (10 minutes, hourly) to Buckland Abbey.

NORTH DEVON

The north Devon coastline is markedly different to its southern cousin; altogether more rugged and rather less touristy, with some great beaches, pretty seaside towns and excellent surf breaks.

Braunton & Croyde

☎ 01271 / pop 8319

Croyde Bay and the nearby beach at Saunton Sands are Devon's most popular surfing spots, with a clutch of good camp sites, B&Bs and pubs. Check out the Croyde Surf Club website (www.croydesurfclub.com) for webcam shots from all the area's main breaks.

Braunton is the centre for surf shops and board hire. The **tourist office** (☎ 816400; brauntontic@visit.org.uk; Bakehouse Centre; ⏰ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) provides information and also houses a small local museum.

Croyde has numerous surf-hire shops, charging around £15 per day for board and wetsuit: try **Le Sport** (☎ 890147; Hobbs Hill; ⏰ 9am-9pm Apr-Sep) or **Redwood Surfhire** (☎ 890999; Down End car park). For lessons, contact **Surfing Croyde Bay** (☎ 891200; www.surfingcroydebay.co.uk) or **Surf South West** (☎ 890400; www.surfsouthwest.com; per half-/full day £25/45), both accredited by the British Surfing Association (BSA).

SLEEPING & EATING

Camp sites are plentiful but you should still book ahead.

Bay View Farm (☎ 890501; www.bayviewfarm.co.uk; sites from £15) On the road from Braunton, this is one of the area's best camp sites, with laundry and showers onsite.

Mitchum's Campsites (☎ 890233; www.croydebay.co.uk) There are two locations, one in Croyde village and one by the beach, but they're only open on certain weekends in summer, so phone ahead.

Chapel Farm (☎ 890429; www.chapelfarmcroyde.co.uk; Hobbs Hill; r £44-56; Ⓟ ⊠) A lovely old thatched farmhouse with beamed rooms, rustic furniture and an inglenook fireplace; there's also self-catering in the old smithy behind the house.

Thatch (☎ 890349; www.thethatch.com; 14 Hobbs Hill; d £50-60) Legendary among surfers for its great pub atmosphere and hearty food; the upstairs rooms are fine, but the nightlife can get a little rowdy.

Billy Budd's (☎ 890606; Hobbs Hill; mains £4-10) Another popular surfer's hang-out, serving jacket potatoes, chilli, nachos and huge sandwiches, as well as more substantial main meals and local ales.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 308 runs from Barnstaple (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

Ilfracombe

☎ 01271 / pop 12,430

Strung out along a grand seafront promenade backed by a string of Edwardian villas and budget B&Bs, the coastal town of Ilfracombe has been attracting tourists since before Queen Victoria was on the throne, and it's still a favourite destination for holidaying Brits looking for a spot of bracing sea air and summer sunshine. Chic it certainly isn't, but Ilfracombe makes an attractive spot to sample the peculiar charms of the British seaside – candy floss, cloudy days, chip wrappers and all. There are small beaches beyond the grassy headland of Hillsborough, but the best sand is 5 miles west at Woolacombe; the little cove of Lee Bay around the headland is also worth seeking out.

The **tourist office** (☎ 863001; www.ilfracombe-tourism.co.uk; The Landmark, The Seafront; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, longer hours in summer) is housed inside the twin-towered Landmark Theatre.

SLEEPING

Ocean Backpackers (☎ 867835; www.oceanbackpackers.co.uk; 29 St James Pl; dm £9-12) A well-run backpacker's in a large house near the seafront, with smallish dorms and a chaotic kitchen; the owners can help organise local activities including surfing, kayaking and even archery.

Norbury House Hotel (☎ 863888; Torrs Park; d £60-78; Ⓟ ⊠) For something altogether more up-to-date, head for this delightful town-house hotel, where contemporary styling (low-level beds, abstract art and bathroom murals) meets the venerable architecture of a former Victorian gentleman's residence.

Beechwood Hotel (☎ 863800; www.beechwoodhotel.co.uk; Torrs Park; d £76-90; Ⓟ ⊠) A handsome detached house with lovely private gardens filled with tall trees and rhododendrons, offering pleasant if slightly spartan rooms, some of which overlook the town and seashore.

Elmfield Hotel (☎ 863377; Torrs Park; www.elmfieldhotelilfracombe.co.uk; d from £84; Ⓟ 🏊) The pick of Ilfracombe's hotels is this elegant detached pile, set in an acre of private grounds and decorated in endearingly old-fashioned style with lots of polished wood and well-worn furniture. The indoor heated swimming pool justifies staying here even if the rooms aren't quite to your taste.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 3 and 30 (40 minutes, every half-hour Monday to Friday, hourly Sunday) run to Barnstaple. Bus 300 heads to Lynton (one hour) and Minehead (two hours) three times daily.

Clovelly

☎ 01237 / pop 452

Clifftop villages don't come more picturesque than Clovelly, which seems to have been stuck in a time warp since the middle of the 19th century. A tangle of cob cottages and slate roofs tumbling down the side of a practically sheer cliff, Clovelly was once one of the busiest fishing harbours on the north Devon coast. The cobbled main street leads all the way uphill from the quay, and once clattered with the sound of donkeys drawing sledges filled with the daily catch. Charles Kingsley, author of the children's classic *The Water Babies*, spent much of his early life in Clovelly (his father was parish rector from 1830 to 1836), and it's still possible to visit his former house, as well as an old fisherman's cottage and the village's twin chapels.

Entry to the privately owned village is via the **visitor centre** (☎ 431781; admission £4.75), where there's a short film about the history of the village and a tearoom and shops. From Easter to October, Land Rovers regularly ferry visitors up and down the slope for £2 between 10am and 5.45pm.

Bus 319 runs five times daily to Bideford (40 minutes) and Barnstaple (one hour).

Hartland Abbey

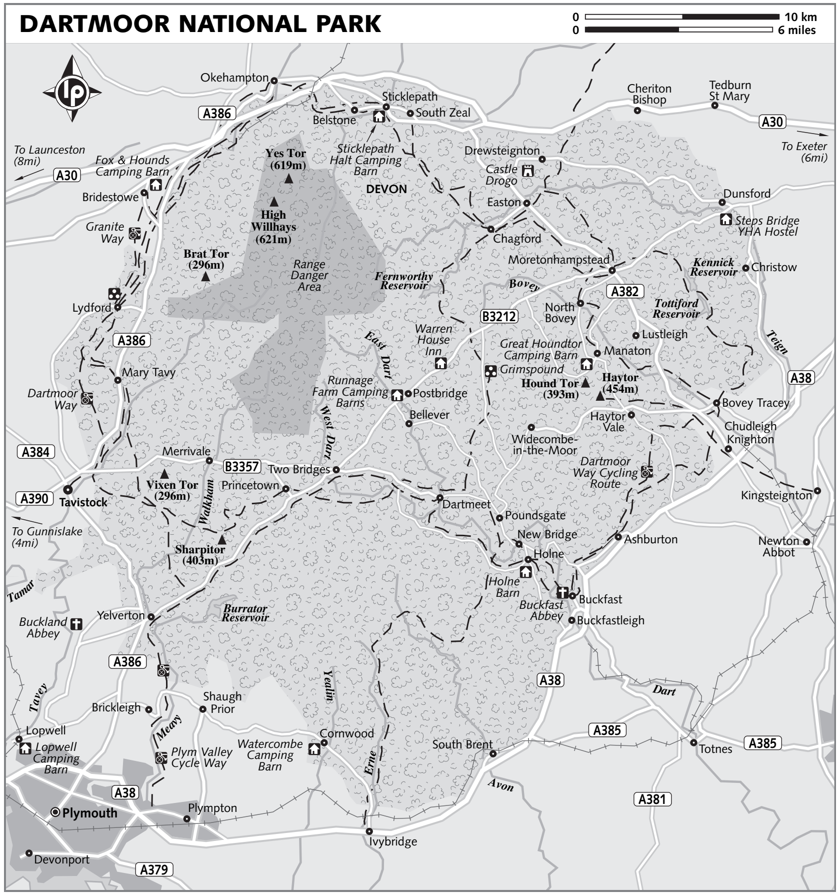
This 12th-century **monastery-turned-stately-home** (☎ 01237-441264; www.hartlandabbey.com; admission £7; ⏰ 2-5.30pm Wed, Thu & Sun Apr-Oct, plus Tue Jul & Aug) was another post-Dissolution handout, given to the sergeant of Henry VIII's wine cellar in 1539. It boasts some fascinating murals, ancient documents, paintings by English masters, Victorian photos, as well as marvellous gardens.

Hartland Abbey is 15 miles west of Bideford, off the A39 between Hartland and Hartland Quay.

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK

After spending a few days exploring the gentle coastline of south Devon, Dartmoor comes as something of a shock to the senses. The largest stretch of open moorland in the southwest, Dartmoor covers an area of 365 sq miles between Plymouth and Exeter, stretching for around 22 miles between Yelverton in the east and Dunsford in the west. It's a stark, wild and bleakly beautiful place, dotted with granite-topped hills, marshy bogs and patches of purple heather, as well as many weirdly shaped tors – rock pillars sculpted into strange forms by the wind and weather.

Dartmoor is named after the River Dart, which has its source here; the West and East Dart merge at Dartmeet. Most of the park is around 600m high – the highest spot is High Willhays (621m) near Okehampton. About 40% of Dartmoor is common land but 15% (the northwestern section, including High Willhays and Yes Tor) is leased to the Ministry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To Exeter (6mi)
To Launceston (8mi)
A30
Fox & Hounds Camping Barn
Bridestowe
Yes Tor (619m)
High Willhays (621m)
DEVON
Drewsteignton
Castle Drogo
Easton
Dunsford
Steps Bridge YHA Hostel
Granite Way
Brat Tor (296m)
Range Danger Area
Fernworthy Reservoir
Chagford
Moretonhampstead
Kennick Reservoir
Christow
Bovey
A382
Tottiford Reservoir
Lydford
North Bovey
B3212
Lustleigh
Teign
A386
Warren House Inn
East Dart
Great Houndtor Camping Barn
Manaton
Grimspound
Hound Tor (393m)
Haytor (454m)
A38
Mary Tavy
Runnage Farm Camping Barns
Postbridge
Bovey Tracey
Dartmoor Way
Bellever
Haytor Vale
Chudleigh Knighton
West Dart
A384
Merrivale
B3357
Widecombe-in-the-Moor
Dartmoor Way Cycling Route
Two Bridges
Vixen Tor (296m)
Princetown
Walkham
A390
Tavistock
Dartmeet
Kingsteignton
Poundsgate
To Gunnislake (4mi)
New Bridge
Sharpitor (403m)
Ashburton
Newton Abbot
Holne
Tamar
Holne Barn
Buckfast
Buckfast Abbey
Buckfastleigh
Buckland Abbey
Yelverton
Burrator Reservoir
A386
Yealm
A38
Tavy
Dart
Brickleigh
Shaugh Prior
Meavy
Lopwell
Lopwell Camping Barn
Cornwood
A385
Plym Valley Cycle Way
Watercombe Camping Barn
South Brent
Totnes
A385
Erme
Avon
A38
Plympton
A381
Plymouth
Ivybridge
Devonport
A379

of Defence (MOD) and is closed for firing practice for part of the year.

Dartmoor encloses some of the wildest, bleakest country in England: suitable terrain for *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (one of Sherlock Holmes' more notorious foes). The landscape and weather can make this an extremely eerie place; try not to think of *An American Werewolf in London* on a dark, foggy night. With its forbidding landscape and scattered prehistoric remains, it's magnificent walking country, but bring a good map: it's easy to get lost, particularly when the mist rolls in.

Orientation

Dartmoor is 6 miles from Exeter and 7 miles from Plymouth. The B3212 cuts right across the centre of the moor, passing through the tiny villages of Two Bridges, Postbridge and Moretonhampstead. A number of small market towns and villages, including Ashburton, Buckfastleigh, Tavistock and Okehampton, ring the outer edge of the moor. Most of the villages and sights are on the eastern side; the western part is mainly frequented by serious walkers (and MOD artillery).

Information

The **National Park Authority** (NPA; www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk) runs the main High Moorland Visitors Centre in Princetown (p312), as well as smaller visitor centres at **Haytor** (☎ 01364-661520), **Postbridge** (☎ 01822-880272) and **Newbridge** (☎ 01364-631303). The centres are generally open from 10am to 5pm daily, April to October.

The free *Dartmoor Visitor* newspaper is published annually and is packed with useful info. The centres also stock walking guides, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, and leaflets on hiking, horse riding, cycling and lots of other activities.

The **Dartmoor Tourist Association** (www.discoverdartmoor.co.uk) is another useful information resource.

Don't feed the miniature Dartmoor ponies as this encourages them to move dangerously near to the roads.

Activities

CANOEING

Canoeing is possible during the winter months on several of Dartmoor's rivers. The British Canoeing Union operates a permit system for the River Dart; visit www.dartaccess.co.uk for further information.

CLIMBING

Popular climbing areas are at Haytor, owned by the NPA, and the Dewerstone near Shaugh Prior, owned by the National Trust. Groups need to book in advance. Ask at a national park visitor centre or tourist office for details.

CYCLING

Cycling is only allowed on public roads, byways, public bridlepaths and Forestry Commission roads. There are a couple of marked cycling routes around the moor, including the **Plym Valley Cycle Way** along the disused Great Western Railway between Plymouth and Yelverton, and the **Dartmoor Way**, a 90-mile circular cycling route through Okehampton, Chagford, Buckfastleigh, Princetown and Tavistock.

The best place for bike hire is **Devon Cycle Hire** (☎ 01837-861141; www.devoncyclehire.co.uk; Sourton Down, near Okehampton; bikes per day £12), which is handily situated along the Granite Way. Alternatively try **Okehampton Cycles** (☎ 01837-53248; North Rd, Okehampton).

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

There are lots of places to get in the saddle around Dartmoor. *Dartmoor Visitor* has full details. Prices start at around £18 per hour for half-day rides.

Babeny Farm Riding Stable (☎ 01364-631296; Poundsgate)
Dartmoor Riding Centre (☎ 01364-73266; Cheston)
Shilstone Rocks Riding Centre (☎ 01364-621281; www.dartmoor-riding.com; Widecombe-in-the-Moor)

WALKING

Walking is the main activity on Dartmoor. There are some 730 miles of public footpaths and bridleways to discover, and following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2005, much of the rest of the moor is now open to enthusiastic ramblers. Waymarked walking routes include the **Abbot's Way**, an ancient 14-mile route from Buckfast to Princetown, and the **West Devon Way**, a 14-mile hike between Tavistock and Okehampton.

Organised walks exploring the area's wildlife, archaeology and folklore start from various points around the park, guided by volunteer Dartmoor rangers. Contact the **High Moorland Visitors Centre** (☎ 01822-890414) for itineraries. Prices for the walks range from around £4 to £8; bus travellers can join walks free of charge.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping rough on Dartmoor is generally allowed, but it's better for the park if you stick to designated camp sites. Many farms and hostels provide space for campers. There are also several camping barns around the park, including six run by the YHA. Cooking and shower facilities and a wood burner are provided, but only a few barns have bunk beds. For bookings, phone ☎ 01200-420102, or visit www.yha.org.uk.

For a little more comfort, there are excellent YHA hostels at Postbridge (Bellever) and Steps Bridge, as well as Okehampton, Exeter and Dartington. B&Bs and country hotels are dotted around most towns and villages around the moor.

WARNING

Much of the northwest corner of Dartmoor is owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and is regularly used for artillery practice. The areas are marked by red-and-white posts and notice boards at the main approaches; red flags (red lights at night) denote live firing is in progress. Firing schedules are available from the **MOD** (☎ 0800 458 4868), the National Park Authority and tourist offices.

DARTMOOR HIKES

The **Templer Way** is an 18-mile hike from Teignmouth to Haytor, following the route originally used to transport Dartmoor granite down to the docks.

The **Two Moors Way** is a longer option, running from Ivybridge, on the southern edge of Dartmoor, 103 miles across Dartmoor and Exmoor to Lynmouth on the north Devon coast.

The **Dartmoor Way** is a 90-mile circular route, stretching from Buckfastleigh in the south, through Moretonhampstead, northwest to Okehampton and south through Lydford to Tavistock. The *Dartmoor Way* pack (£7.95) includes a book and 1:25,000 scale map, and is available from tourist offices and NPA centres. For further information, call ☎ 0870 241 1817 or check www.dartmoorway.org.uk.

The **Tarka Trail** circles north Devon and links with Dartmoor, south of Okehampton; *The Tarka Trail: A Walkers' Guide* can be purchased for £6.45.

It's always wise to carry a map, compass and rain gear since the weather can change very quickly and not all walks are waymarked. OS Explorer Map No 28 (1:50,000; £6.99) is the most comprehensive map, showing the park boundaries and MOD firing-range areas.

The **Dartmoor Tourist Association** (☎ 01822-890567; www.discoverdartmoor.com; High Moor Visitors Centre, Princetown) produces an annual *Dartmoor Guide* with full accommodation listings.

Getting There & Around

The *Discovery Guide to Dartmoor*, available free from most Devon tourist offices and NPA offices, has full details of bus and train services around the park. There are scheduled buses to various points around the park from Totnes, Exeter, Plymouth and Okehampton. The most useful bus is 82, the Transmoor Link, running between Exeter and Plymouth via Moretonhampstead, Warren House Inn, Postbridge, Princetown and Yelverton (three daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

The Dartmoor Sunday Rover ticket (adult £5, June to September) entitles you to unlimited travel on most bus routes, and to train travel on the Tamar Valley Line from Plymouth to Gunnislake. Buy your ticket from bus drivers or at Plymouth train station.

The only main-line train station within easy reach of the park is Okehampton; see p315 for train details.

Princetown

☎ 01822

Perched on a bleak rise of moorland 8 miles east of Tavistock, Princetown is England's highest town, but it's best known as the location of one of Britain's most infamous high-security prisons. The gloomy granite form of **Dartmoor Prison**, built in 1809 to house French and American prisoners of war, looms ominously over the northern edge of town. It's far from the most beautiful spot on Dartmoor, but Princetown's central location makes it a good base for walking.

If you're after an unusual souvenir, the **Dartmoor Prison Museum** (☎ 890305; www.dartmoor-prison.co.uk; admission £2; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) sells craftwork (mainly benches and garden gnomes) whittled into shape by current prisoners; the museum itself offers an insight into the gaol's early days.

The **High Moorland Visitors Centre** (☎ 890414; hmvc@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk; Old Duchy Hotel; 🕒 10am-5pm) has displays on Dartmoor and an information centre that stocks maps, guides and books. The visitor centre started life as Princetown's main hotel, where Arthur Conan Doyle began his classic Dartmoor tale *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

There's no great reason to stay in Princetown, but there are a couple of pleasant inns serving stout pub grub; try the **Railway Inn** (☎ 890232; Two Bridges Rd) or the **Plume of Feathers** (☎ 890240; The Square), which also has a camping barn and a few unspectacular rooms.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 (the Transmoor Link) runs to Princetown from Exeter (one hour, 40 minutes) and Plymouth (50 minutes).

Postbridge

☎ 01822

There's not much to the tiny village of Postbridge apart from a couple of shops, pubs and whitewashed houses. It's best known for its 13th-century **clapper bridge** across the East Dart, made of large granite slabs supported by stone pillars.

From April to October, there's an **NPA centre** (☎ 880272) in the car park. There's also a post office and shop in the village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Runnage Farm (☎ 880222; www.runnagecampingbarns.com; camping from £5, bunk-beds £6.50-10) This farm has two YHA camping barns, space for camping, and mountain-bike hire. Take the small road off the B3212 towards Moretonhampstead just after Postbridge.

Bellever YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5692; bellever@yha.org.uk; dm £14; 🕒 Mar-Oct) Formerly part of a duchy farm, this cosy walker's hostel is located a mile south of Postbridge, with dorm-only rooms and a small restaurant. Bus 98 runs from Tavistock (40 minutes, daily Monday to Saturday) and Princetown (20 minutes).

Two Bridges Hotel (☎ 892309; www.twobridges.co.uk; r £65-90; P ☒) A few miles west in the hamlet of Two Bridges, this venerable country hotel offers three categories of accommodation, ranging from standard en suites to premier bedrooms complete with four-poster beds, spa baths and burnished wood furniture. For something extra special, ask for Vivien Leigh's favourite suite.

Warren House Inn (☎ 880208; mains £6-12) Championing itself as Dartmoor's remotest pub, this isolated inn certainly feels a long way from the outside world, surrounded by rolling moorland and warmed by a fire that's allegedly been burning since 1845.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 runs through Postbridge between Plymouth (one hour) and Exeter (1½ hours).

Widecombe-in-the-Moor

☎ 01364

One of the prettiest villages on the moor is Widecombe, centred around a charming green shaded by majestic oaks and a 14th-century granite church (known as the Cathedral in the Moor). The village is commemorated in the traditional English folk song 'Widdicombe Fair'; the fair still takes place here on the second Tuesday of September.

There's a visitor information point at Sexton's Cottage, adjacent to the Church House. Built in 1537 as a brew house, the Church House is now the village hall.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cockingford Farm Campsite (☎ 621258; sites £3-8; 🕒 mid-Mar–Nov) This camp site is around 1.5 miles south of Widecombe.

Dartmoor Expedition Centre (☎ 621249; www.dartmoorbase.co.uk; bunkhouse £9.50, loft r £11.50) This outdoor activities centre offers bunk beds in a comfortable converted barn, and organises orienteering, canoeing, walking and climbing trips.

Lower Blackaton (☎ 621369; www.lowerblackaton.co.uk; d from £40; P ☒) This traditional 17th-century granite longhouse is 3 miles from Widecombe in a commanding position overlooking wild moorland. The five bedrooms have been carefully converted to preserve the house's traditional character, and there's an Aga-equipped kitchen and a well-stocked library.

Higher Venton Farm (☎ 621235; www.ventonfarm.com; tw/d £44/48; ☒) Half a mile from the village centre, this delightful 15th-century thatched farmhouse sits at the centre of 45 acres of working farmland and offers three rustic, oak-beamed bedrooms; as you'd expect, the home-cooked breakfasts are superb.

Old Inn (☎ 621207; mains £5-12) The heart of village life for three centuries and still going strong, this fine old country inn serves hearty meals and great beer.

Rugglestone Inn (☎ 621327; mains from £5) Just downhill from the village centre, this flower-covered pub has a homely main bar and an outside terrace peacefully placed beside a rushing brook.

WORTH THE TRIP

Holne Chase Hotel (☎ 01364-631471; www.holne-chase.co.uk; Tavistock Rd; d £160-180, ste £200-210; dinner £35; P ☒) Hidden away in a beautiful wooded valley above the River Dart, this is arguably the finest of the country house hotels on Dartmoor. Built as a hunting lodge for nearby Buckfast Abbey, the grand gabled house commands sweeping views across private parkland, and is decorated with the style and sophistication you'd expect from a top-notch hotel: antique furniture, opulent fireplaces and effortlessly chic furnishings are dotted throughout the bedrooms and public lounges, and there are several 'stable suites' housed in a cluster of detached cottages beside the main hotel. One to remember.

PREHISTORIC DARTMOOR

The first settlers arrived on Dartmoor somewhere around 12,000 years ago, after the end of the last ice age. The moor looked very different then; it was almost entirely covered by trees, providing a rich source of food, fuel and natural shelter. Evidence of these early settlers is dotted all over Dartmoor; over 1500 cairns and burial chambers have been discovered and the area has more ceremonial rows and stone circles than anywhere else in Britain. The **Grey Wethers** stone circles stand side by side on a stretch of open moor halfway between Chagford and Postbridge, about half a kilometre from another stone circle near **Fernworthy**. **Scorhill** stone circle, near Gidleigh, is sometimes called the Stonehenge of Dartmoor, although only half of the original stones remain. Another intriguing site is at **Merrivale**, on the main road from Princetown to Tavistock, where you'll find several stone rows and standing stones, as well as a small ceremonial circle and the remains of several stone huts. But the most impressive site is the Bronze Age village of **Grimspound**, just off the B3212, where you can still see the remains of the circular stone wall that once surrounded the village, and the ruins of several granite round houses.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 272 stops at Widecombe from Tavistock (one hour 20 minutes, two daily) travelling via Princetown and Two Bridges en route. The afternoon bus continues to Totnes. Bus 274 travels from Okehampton (1¾ hours, three on Sunday) via Moretonhampstead. Several other buses stop at Widecombe on Sunday only as part of the Sunday Rover scheme.

Moretonhampstead

☎ 01647

The small market town of Moretonhampstead stands at an old crossroads where two of the main routes across Dartmoor meet, and makes a handy base for exploring the eastern moor.

SLEEPING & EATING

Steps Bridge YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6048; dm adult £11; 🕐 Apr-Sep) A typically efficient chalet-style YHA hostel, about 4.5 miles east of Moretonhampstead along the B3212. Buses 82 and 359 run to Moretonhampstead (15 minutes) and Exeter (40 minutes).

Sparrowhawk Backpackers (☎ 440318; www.sparrowhawkbackpackers.co.uk; 45 Ford St; dm £13, r £30) This welcoming, environmentally friendly backpacker's offers dorm beds in a smartly converted stone stable, solar-heated showers and an excellent veggie kitchen – you can even order your organic veg supplies in advance.

Moorcote Guest House (☎ 440966; www.moorcotehouse.co.uk; s £38, d £48; 🅿 🚭) This elegant double-gabled Victorian house is surrounded by grassy gardens, set back slightly from the main road. The rooms are plain and pleasant, though not all have en suite.

White Hart Hotel (☎ 441340; The Square; s £60-70, d £99-120, mains £8-16; 🅿 🚭) Owned by local entrepreneur Peter de Savary, who also runs a super-exclusive country house hotel nearby, this old Dartmoor pub has been renovated in a mix of traditional and modern styles – the restaurant and bar have bags of rough-stoned, wood-beamed charm, while the upstairs rooms are thoroughly up-to-date, with flat-screen TVs, big beds and all the mod cons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 82 runs twice daily in summer from Moretonhampstead to Princetown (40 minutes), Plymouth (1½ hours) and Exeter (one hour). Bus 359 also goes to Exeter (seven daily Monday to Saturday).

Okehampton

☎ 01837 / pop 7029

Just outside the national park on the main A30 road, Okehampton is the largest town within easy reach of Dartmoor and makes an ideal base for exploring the northern part of the moor. The **tourist office** (☎ 53020; oketic@visit.org.uk; Museum Courtyard, 3 West St; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct) can help with accommodation and walks.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A Norman motte and ruined keep is all that remains of Devon's largest **castle** (EH; ☎ 52844; admission £3; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug); a free audio guide fills in the missing parts.

It's a pleasant three- to four-hour walk along the Tarka Trail from Okehampton to Sticklepath, where the **Finch Foundry** (NT; ☎ 840046; admission £3.70; 🕐 11am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct) has three working water wheels.

SLEEPING

Okehampton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5978; www.okehampton-yha.co.uk; Klondyke Rd; dm £15.50; 🕐 Feb-Nov; 🅿 🚭) The YHA's flagship Dartmoor hostel stands on the site of the old Okehampton station and doubles as an outdoor activities centre, complete with its own climbing wall and regular organised adventure trips.

Knole Farm (☎ 861241; www.knolefarm-dartmoor-holidays.co.uk; Bridestowe; d £46-50; 🅿 🚭) A fine country B&B inside an imposing stone farmhouse 10 miles west of Okehampton, with three floral rooms named after local landmarks and breathtaking views across the moor from the front garden.

Collaven Manor (☎ 861522; www.collavenmanor.co.uk; Sourton; s £61, d £98-120; 🅿 🚭) Nine cosy rooms are squeezed in among the roof beams and solid stone walls of this elegant manor house in the hamlet of Sourton, 5 miles west of Okehampton.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lots of local buses run through Okehampton. Bus X9 runs from Exeter (50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Okehampton to Bude. Bus 179 runs two or three times daily to Chagford (30 minutes) and Moretonhampstead (50 minutes). Extra buses run across the moor on summer Sundays.

The steam **Dartmoor Railway** (☎ 55637; www.dartmoorrailway.co.uk) runs between Okehampton and Meldon (£3.50 single, 10 minutes, two on Tuesday, five to seven on weekends April to October), with extra trains to Sampford Courtenay (£3 single) on some Saturdays. Timetables change regularly; phone for details or check the website.

Connecting trains to Okehampton from Exeter run on certain Sundays in summer.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lydford is best known for the 1.5-mile **Lydford Gorge** (NT; ☎ 820320; admission £5; 🕐 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10.30am-3pm Nov-Mar). An attractive but strenuous riverside walk leads to the 28m-high White Lady waterfall past a series of bubbling whirlpools, including the Devil's Cauldron. Alternatively, you can drive to the car park at the other end of the track, near the waterfall itself.

CORNWALL

The former poet laureate John Betjeman once referred to Cornwall as another country, not just another county, and he was dead right – the ancient land of Kernow has long nurtured a sense of distance from the rest of Britain, with its own customs, traditions and distinctive Celtic culture. Cornwall even boasted its own language – Kernewek, a Celtic tongue related to Breton and Welsh – and although the last native speaker died in 1874, the language is currently undergoing a mini-renaissance, along with many other aspects of traditional Cornish culture. While the traditional industries of fishing, farming and tin-mining have long been in decline, tourism in Cornwall is booming and the county is currently reinventing itself as a haven for culture and the arts, with a clutch of world-class attractions such as the Eden Project and the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth.

Orientation & Information

Cornwall is just over 50 miles wide at its broadest, near the Devon border, and it's only 77 miles from Penzance to Plymouth, just across the Tamar from Cornwall, so you're never far from the coast and the main attractions.

The county is divided into several districts, most of which publish handy brochures with accommodation listings. **Visit Cornwall** (☎ 01872-322900; www.visitcornwall.co.uk), otherwise known as the Cornwall Tourist Board, is the main point of contact, and can provide you with information on subjects ranging from Cornish cuisine to cycling trails and adventure sports.

For the low-down on all the latest events and arts exhibitions, check out the comprehensive listings at www.seencornwall.com.

Getting Around

Most of Cornwall's main bus, train and ferry timetables are collected into one handy brochure (available free from bus stations and tourist offices).

BUS

The main bus operator in Cornwall is **First** (☎ 0845 600 1420; www.firstgroup.com). The FirstDay ticket (£6) offers unlimited travel on its bus networks for 24 hours, it's also available in weekly (£28) and monthly (£80) versions.

CAMPER CAPERS

Want to tour the southwest in style? Then you'll need your own vintage VW campervan, complete with grill, fridge, crockery, cutlery, four bunk beds and the kitchen sink. Contact **O'Connor's Campers** (☎ 01837-659599; www.oconnorscampers.co.uk) in Okehampton or **Kernow Kampers** (☎ 01637-830027; www.kernowkampers.co.uk) near Newquay. Prices start from around £375 per week; surfboards and sunglasses not included.

Two of the smaller companies, **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453; www.truronian.com) and **Western Greyhound** (☎ 01637-871871; www.westerngreyhound.com), also offer handy Day Rover tickets (£5). Many tourist attractions (including the Eden Project) offer discounts if you arrive by bus.

For the latest timetables, call ☎ 01872-322003 or visit www.cornwall.gov.uk/buses.

TRAIN

If you're taking the train, phone **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50) for the latest timetables and fares. The main route from London passes through Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Liskeard, Truro and Camborne en route to Penzance; there are also branch lines to St Ives, Falmouth, Newquay and Looe.

The Cornish Day Ranger (£10) ticket allows one day's travel on trains after 9.30am Monday to Friday and all weekend. There are also Branch Rover tickets valid on one of the county's spur lines. The Cornish Railcard (£10 per year) entitles you to 33% off most train fares in Cornwall.

TRURO

☎ **01872 / pop 17,431**

Cornwall's capital city has been at the centre of the county's fortunes for over eight centuries. Truro grew up around a hilltop castle (no longer standing) built by Richard Lucy, a minister of Henry II's, but it was the town's position at the confluence of the Rivers Allen, Kenwyn and Truro that sealed its fortunes (the town's name is thought to derive from the Cornish word *tri-veru*, meaning three rivers). Throughout the Middle Ages, Truro was one of five Stannary towns in Cornwall, where the county's tin and copper was assayed and stamped. The city's three-spired cathedral was completed in 1910, the first new cathedral to be built in England since St Paul's. Today, little evidence remains of Truro's industrial heyday, but the city still makes a good base, with a selection of shops, galleries and restaurants and Cornwall's main museum.

Information

Library (☎ 279205; Union Pl; internet access per hr £3; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat)
Post office (High Cross; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 274555; tic@truro.gov.uk; Boscawen St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat).

Sights

The **Royal Cornwall Museum** (☎ 272205; www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk; River St; admission free; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is the county's oldest museum and has some excellent displays exploring the county's industrial and archaeological past. There are also temporary exhibitions of art, photography and local craft.

Built on the site of a 16th-century parish church in soaring Gothic Revival style, **Truro Cathedral** (☎ 276782; www.trurocathedral.org.uk; High Cross; suggested donation £4) contains an impressive high-vaulted nave, some fine Victorian stained glass and the world-famous Father Willis Organ.

The **Lemon Street Market** (Lemon St) houses craft shops, cafés, delicatessens and an upstairs art gallery. There are several excellent art galleries around town, including the upmarket **Lemon Street Gallery** (☎ 275757; 13 Lemon St; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Guided tours (☎ 271257; blue.badge@kernow.net; adult/child £3/1.50) of the town depart from the tourist office at 11am every Wednesday.

Sleeping

Carlton Hotel (☎ 223938; www.carltonhotel.co.uk; 49 Falmouth Rd; s £40-47.50, d £57.50-65; 🅿 ☒) This excellent-value B&B just up the main hill from the city centre makes a great base for exploring Truro and further afield, with a range of simply finished rooms inside the gabled town house. Little luxuries include a sauna, Jacuzzi and cycle storage.

Royal Hotel (☎ 270345; www.royalhotelcornwall.co.uk; Lemon St; s £69, d £90-115; 🅿 ☒ 💻) In the heart of the city, the Georgian-fronted Royal Hotel is the top place to stay in town, with 35 bold, bright bedrooms, each with a slightly different character (the best is the loft-style room, number 39). For something even more stylish, check out the super-sleek 'aparthotels' just behind the main building, which come with dishwashers, galley kitchens and contemporary workspaces.

Alverton Manor (☎ 276633; reception@alvertonmanor.co.uk; Tregolls Rd; s £80, d £95-180; 🅿 ☒) Just outside the town centre, this grand hotel, housed in a former convent and surrounded by landscaped grounds, makes a luxurious place to stay. There's a selection of country-style rooms, ranging from standard singles to spacious suites – make sure you bag one with a garden view.

Other recommendations:

Fieldings (☎ 262783; www.fieldingsintruro.com; 35 Treyew Rd; s/d £18/32) Pleasant Edwardian house run by a local couple, with great city views.

Townhouse (☎ 277374; www.trurotownhouse.com; 20 Falmouth Rd; s £45, d £65-75; 🅿 ☒) City-style B&B with pleasant rooms, guest kitchen and a buffet breakfast.

Eating

Xen Noodle Bar (☎ 222998; 47-49 Calenick St; mains £4-8; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This reliable noodle bar brings out the best from Chinese standards without overdosing on the MSG.

Saffron (☎ 263771; Quay St; mains £8-15; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sat) For something more intimate, you can't do better than this tiny backstreet brasserie – local produce and fish dishes always feature heavily on the ever-changing menu.

Mannings Restaurant (☎ 247900; www.trurorestaurants.co.uk; mains £12-19; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The restaurant at the Royal Hotel is one of the town's busiest eating places. Cocktails and beers are served in the foyer bar, and the main restaurant menu takes in everything from fresh fish to blackened chicken and Mexican fajitas.

Stingi Lulu's (☎ 262300; River St; mains £14-19; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A funky, buzzy restaurant next door to the museum, with eclectic Eastern-themed décor and a menu that ranges through Thai, Japanese and Indonesian flavours.

Drinking

Indaba (☎ 274700; Tabernacle St) If you like plate glass and chrome pipes with your pints, then head for this award-winning industrial-style café just off Lemon Quay.

Kasbah (☎ 272276; 3 Quay St) This vaguely Eastern wine bar is always stuffed to the gunnels with 30-something boozers at the weekend, so it's hardly surprising that it's expanded into the old teashop next door.

MI Bar (☎ 277214; Lemon Quay) This metropolitan-style bar boasts a modern ambience and guest DJs on weekends.

Old Ale House (☎ 271122; Quay St) There are plenty of pubs around town, but this old-fashioned ale den is the best of the bunch – pick your poison from the daily ale blackboard, find a handy nook, and settle in for the night.

Heron (☎ 272773; Malpas; 🕑 11am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Two miles from the city along the river estuary, in the tiny village of Malpas, this creekside pub serves good beer and excellent pub grub.

Entertainment

Hall for Cornwall (☎ 262466; www.hallforcornwall.co.uk; Lemon Quay) The county's main venue for touring theatre and music, housed in Truro's former town hall on Lemon Quay.

Plaza Cinema (☎ 272894; www.wtwcinemas.co.uk; Lemon St) A four-screen cinema showing mainly mainstream releases.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There are direct National Express coaches to London Victoria (£35.50, 7½ hours, four daily), and local buses to destinations across the county. Bus 18 (1½ hours, hourly) travels to Penzance via Camborne and Redruth, and bus 14 (1½ hours, hourly) travels to St Ives; lots of services travel to Falmouth and Newquay. Buses leave from the bus station just off Lemon Quay.

TRAIN

Truro is on the main line between London Paddington (£102.50, 4½ to five hours, hourly)

WORTH THE TRIP

At the head of the Fal estuary, 4 miles south of Truro, **Trelissick Garden** (NT; ☎ 01872-862090; Feock; admission £5.50; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Feb-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Dec) is one of Cornwall's most beautiful landscaped gardens, with several tiered terraces covered in magnolias, rhododendrons and hydrangeas. A lovely walk runs all the way from the main garden along the river to the estate's private beach.

The Truronian T16 bus runs from Truro (20 minutes, six daily) from Monday to Saturday.

and Penzance (£7.10, 45 minutes, hourly). There's a branch line to Falmouth (£3, 20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday).

SOUTHEAST CORNWALL

Dotted with picturesque fishing villages and patchwork fields, southeast Cornwall offers a much gentler side to the county than the stark, sea-pounded granite cliffs along the northern coast. Carpeted with wildflowers and crisscrossed by hedgerows, this is still working dairy country, where much of Cornwall's famously rich milk and clotted cream is produced.

Looe

☎ 01503 / pop 5280

The twin villages of East and West Looe stand on opposite sides of a broad river estuary, and there's long been a sense of friendly rivalry between the two communities. In previous centuries Looe was a thriving shipyard and fishing port, but these days tourism has taken over as the town's biggest industry. Victorian bathing machines rolled up to the water's edge off **Banjo Pier** throughout the 19th century, and the small beach in East Looe is still a popular spot for sandcastle-building and sunbathing.

The **tourist office** (☎ 262072; www.southeastcornwall.co.uk; Fore St; 🕑 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, noon-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Easter) is in the Guildhall.

The **Monkey Sanctuary** (☎ 262532; www.monkeysanctuary.org; St Martins; admission £5; 🕑 11am-4.30pm Sun-Thu Easter-Sep), a popular attraction half a mile west of Looe, is home to some unfeasibly cute woolly monkeys and a colony of horseshoe bats.

A mile offshore from Hannafore Point is tiny Looe Island, a 22-acre nature reserve established by sisters Babs and Evelyn Atkins, who jointly bought the island in 1965 and lived and worked there for most of their lives. The island is now administered by the Cornwall Wildlife Trust; occasional boat trips travel there in summer from the quay in East Looe. Ask at the tourist office for details.

SLEEPING

Barclay House (☎ 262929; www.barclayhouse.co.uk; St Martins Rd; d £70-90; 🅿 🏊 🚭) This gorgeous detached Victorian villa in 6 acres of private gardens has the best bedrooms in Looe, decorated in graceful shades of peach, pistachio and aquamarine, and some of the most glorious river views you could possibly wish for.

Trehaven Manor Hotel (☎ 262028; www.trehavenhotel.co.uk; Station Rd; d £80-110; 🅿 🚭) A grand 19th-century manor house that's been lovingly converted to provide several delightful rooms, all with their own unique touches – some have rolltop baths and cast-iron bedframes, others have small sitting areas and estuary views.

Other recommendations:

Tresco (☎ 265981; www.trescolooe.co.uk; Dawn Rd; r £64-76; 🅿 🚭) Plush B&B with balcony bedrooms overlooking Hannafore Point.

Beach House (☎ 262598; www.thebeachhouselooe.com; Hannafore Point; d £80-110; 🅿 🚭) Stunningly situated, contemporary B&B, with rooms named after Cornish beaches.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains travel the scenic Looe Valley Line from Liskeard (£2.50, 30 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), on the London–Penzance line.

Bus 80A or 81A (four daily, two on Sunday) and bus 72 (two daily Monday to Saturday) from Polperro both stop at Looe en route to Plymouth. Bus 573 from Looe only stops at Polperro on Sunday.

Polperro

Polperro is another ancient fishing village, a picturesque muddle of narrow lanes and fishing cottages set around a tiny harbour, best approached along the coastal path from Looe or Talland. It's always jammed with day-trippers and coach tours in summer, so arrive in the evening or out of season if possible.

Polperro was once heavily involved in pilchard fishing by day and smuggling by night; the small **Heritage Museum** (☎ 01503-272423; The Warren; admission £1; 🕑 10am-6pm Easter-Oct) features some fascinating smuggling memorabilia and tells some interesting tales.

For buses to Polperro see above.

Fowey

☎ 01726 / pop 2273

Nestled on the steep tree-covered hillside overlooking the River Fowey, opposite the old fishing harbour of Polruan, Fowey (pronounced Foy) is a pretty tangle of pale-shaded houses and snaking lanes. It has a long maritime history, and in the 14th century raids on French and Spanish coastal towns were conducted from here. To defend the town against Spanish raids, Henry VIII constructed **St Catherine's Castle** (EH; admission free), above Readymoney Beach, south of town. The town later prospered by shipping china clay, quarried at the clay pits around St Austell, but the industrial trade has long disappeared and Fowey has now reinvented itself for summertime tourists and second-home-owners.

The **tourist office** (☎ 833616; www.fowey.co.uk; 5 South St; 🕑 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) shares a building, phone and opening hours with a literary centre devoted to Fowey's most famous resident, the British thriller-writer Daphne du Maurier (1907–89), who lived most of her life in a house at nearby Polridmouth Cove. Every May Fowey hosts the **Daphne du Maurier Literary Festival** (www.dumaurier.org) in her honour.

Fowey is at the southern end of the Saints' Way, a 26-mile waymarked trail running to Padstow on the northern coast. **Ferries** (car/pedestrian £2.30/90p; 🕑 in summer last ferry 8.50pm) cross the river to Bodinnick. The 4-mile Hall Walk leads along the river to Polruan, from where you can catch a return ferry to Fowey.

SLEEPING & EATING

Golant YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5832; golant@yha.org.uk; Penquite House; dm £15.50; 💻) This imposing whitewashed Georgian manor house makes a fantastic base in Fowey, with views across the estuary and helpful staff who can organise walking trips and other local activities.

Globe Posting House Hotel (☎ 833322; www.globepostinghouse.co.uk; 19 Fore St; s £22.50, d £45-55; 🚭) A snug little hotel with a clutch of cosy rooms tucked away along its higgledy-piggledy corridors, all with low ceilings and sturdy walls, and decorated in relaxing shades of white and blue.

Marina Hotel (☎ 833315; www.themarinahotel.co.uk; The Esplanade; d £108-152) A boutique-styled gem slightly out of the town centre, with an elegant staircase leading to a confection of plush, expensive bedrooms. Some are exceedingly poky for the money – hold out for a back room on the upper floors if you can, most of which have private patios and lovely river views.

Old Quay House (☎ 833302; 28 Fore St; www.theoldquayhouse.com; d £160-210; 🚭) This beautifully appointed luxury hotel is right in the heart of Fowey and offers some really lavish rooms, decorated with natural fabrics, rattan chairs and achingly tasteful tones; seven rooms have private balconies above the estuary.

King of Prussia (☎ 627208; www.kingofprussia.co.uk; Town Quay) The king of Fowey's many pubs takes its name from the local 'free trader' John Carter, and makes a lovely spot for a quayside pint or a quick lunchtime sandwich.

Food For Thought (☎ 832221; 4 Town Quay; menu £19.95; 🕑 lunch & dinner) There's a touch of the French Riviera to this smart restaurant on the corner of Town Quay, with an excellent fixed-price menu filled with fishy treats, and a pleasant outside terrace shaded by navy-blue awnings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 25 from St Austell (55 minutes, half-hourly) runs to Fowey via Par, the closest train station.

Lanhydrock House

Set in 900 acres of sweeping grounds above the River Fowey, the 16th-century manor house of **Lanhydrock** (NT; ☎ 01208-73320; house & gardens £9, gardens only £5; 🕑 house 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Mar-Sep, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct, gardens 10am-6pm year-round) was devastated by fire in 1881, but was later rebuilt in lavish style. The house offers a fascinating insight into 'upstairs–downstairs' life in Victorian England: highlights include the gentlemen's smoking room (complete with old Etonian photos, moose heads and tiger-skin rugs), the children's toy-strewn nursery, and the huge original kitchens. There's also a fabulous carved ceiling in the Long Gallery.

Lanhydrock is 2.5 miles southeast of Bodmin. Bus 554 runs from Bodmin Parkway train station three times daily.

Restormel Castle

The ruined 13th-century castle at **Restormel** (☎ 01208-872687; admission £2.40; 🕑 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct) has one of the best-preserved circular keeps in the country, affording fine views across the surrounding fields. Edward, the Black Prince, is thought to have stayed there twice during his reign.

Eden Project

The giant biomes of the **Eden Project** (☎ 01726-811911; www.edenproject.com; Bodelva; admission £13.80; 🕑 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) – the largest greenhouses in the world – have become one of Cornwall's most celebrated landmarks since being raised from the dust of an abandoned china clay pit near St Austell in 2000. Tropical, temperate and desert environments have been re-created inside the biomes, so a single visit can carry you from the steaming rainforests of South America to the dry deserts of Northern Africa. In summer the biomes become a spectacular backdrop to the **Eden Sessions** (recent artists include José Gonzalez, Goldfrapp and The Magic Numbers) and from November to February Eden transforms itself into a winter wonderland for the **Time of Gifts** festival, complete with a full-size ice-rink.

It's impressive and immensely popular: crowds (and queues) can be large, so avoid peak times if possible, especially during summer. Eden is about 3 miles northeast of St Austell. **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453) runs shuttle buses from St Austell, Newquay, Helston, Falmouth and Truro; combined bus and admission tickets are available onboard. Alternatively, if you arrive by bike, you'll get £3 off the admission price.

Lost Gardens of Heligan

Before he dreamt up the futuristic phenomenon known as the Eden Project, ex-record producer Tim Smit was best known for rediscovering the **Lost Gardens of Heligan** (☎ 01726-845100; www.heligan.com; Pentewan; admission £7.50; 🕑 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb). Heligan was the former home of the Tremayne family, and during the 19th century was renowned as one of Britain's finest landscaped gardens; the gardens fell into disrepair following WWI (when most of its staff were killed), and are only now regaining their former glory thanks to a dedicated team of gardeners and volunteers. Formal terraces, flower gardens, a working kitchen garden and a spectacular jungle walk through the 'Lost Valley' are just some of Heligan's secrets.

The Lost Gardens of Heligan are 1.5 miles from Mevagissey and 7 miles from St Austell. Bus 25 leaves from St Austell station (30 minutes, nine daily), or you can catch bus 526 (six daily, two on Sunday), which travels from Newquay via St Austell station.

Cotehele

Dating from Tudor times, the manor house at **Cotehele** (NT; ☎ 01579-351346; St Dominick; admission £8, garden & mill only £4.80; 🕑 11am-4.30pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct) served as the family seat of the aristocratic Edgecumbe dynasty for 400 years. It's stocked with some of Britain's finest Tudor interiors, best seen in the great hall, and dotted throughout with impressive tapestries and suits of armour. It's also notoriously haunted – several ghostly figures are said to wander through the house, accompanied by music and a peculiar herbal smell.

Outside, the lovely terraced gardens include a Victorian summerhouse and a medieval dovecote. **Cotehele Quay** is part of the National Maritime Museum and has a small museum with displays on local boat-building and river trade, while the restored **Cotehele Mill** is a 15-minute walk away.

Cotehele is 7 miles southwest of Tavistock on the western bank of the Tamar. Bus 190 travels to Cotehele from Gunnislake station via Callington (40 minutes) four times daily on Sunday.

Roseland Peninsula

South of Truro, this beautiful rural peninsula gets its name not from flowers but from the Cornish word *ros*, meaning promontory. Highlights include the coastal villages of **Portloe**, a wreckers' hang-out on the South West Coast Path, and **Veryan**, awash with daffodils in spring and entered between two thatched roundhouses. Nearby are the beaches of **Carne** and **Pendower**, which join at low tide to form one of the best stretches of sand on Cornwall's south coast.

St Mawes has an unusual clover-leaf **castle** (EH; ☎ 01326-270526; admission £3.60; 🕑 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct, 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Nov-Mar), designed as the sister fortress to Pendennis Castle across the estuary.

WORTH THE TRIP

Lugger Hotel (☎ 01872-501322; www.luggerhotel.co.uk; Portloe; depending on season r £160-180) Teetering over the harbour's edge in the beautiful old fishing town of Portloe, this supremely indulgent boutique hotel makes the consummate place for a romantic getaway. A range of higgledy-piggledy rooms are dotted around the old smuggler's inn and a couple of adjoining fishermen's cottages, making for some imaginative layouts and a charming mix of rough oak beams, clean, contemporary furnishings and huge, decadent beds. Downstairs the elegant restaurant serves fishy treats straight off the boats, and the panoramic portside terrace makes the ideal place for watching the sun go down. When did the British seaside get this sexy?

St-Just-in-Roseland boasts one of the most beautiful churchyards in the country, full of flowers and tumbling down to a creek with boats and wading birds.

SOUTHWEST CORNWALL

Cornwall's southwest coastline, dotted with inlets, estuaries and wooded creeks, has long been one of the county's main maritime areas. The deepwater port at Falmouth – the third-largest natural harbour in the world – makes it a busy seafaring town, and the remote area further to the west around the Lizard was once notorious as a haven for smugglers and wreckers. These days, history and natural scenery are the main attractions, with long stretches of protected coastline, fine beaches and some of Cornwall's most impressive subtropical gardens all within easy reach of Falmouth.

Falmouth

☎ 01326 / pop 20,775

The maritime port of Falmouth sits on the county's south coast at the end of the Carrick Roads, a huge river estuary that empties out into the third-deepest natural harbour in the world. Falmouth's fortunes were made during the 18th and 19th centuries, when clippers, trading vessels and mail packets from across the world stopped off to unload their cargoes in the town, and Falmouth remains an important centre for shipbuilding and repairs. These days, however, it's better known for its lively nightlife and the newly-built campus of the CUC (Combined Universities of Cornwall), a few miles up the road in Penryn; salty seadogs can still get a taste of the town's nautical heritage at the stunning National Maritime Museum beside the harbour.

The **tourist office** (☎ 312300; falmouthtic@yahoo.co.uk; 28 Killigrew St; 🕑 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, plus 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug) is opposite the bus terminal.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pendennis Castle

Falmouth's deepwater harbour has been a vital strategic asset throughout the town's history, a fact acknowledged by Henry VIII, who constructed Cornwall's largest fortress out on Pendennis Point. **Pendennis Castle** (EH; ☎ 316594; adult £4.80; 🕑 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) was designed to defend the entrance to the Carrick Roads in tandem with its sister fortress at St Mawes, on the opposite side of the estuary, although neither fortress was ever engaged in battle.

The recently refurbished visitor centre includes an education suite and an interactive exhibition, which aims to bring the history of the castle to life using reconstructions, artefacts and a hands-on scale model of the castle.

National Maritime Museum

The **National Maritime Museum** (☎ 313388; www.nmmc.co.uk; Discovery Quay; adult £7.00; 🕑 10am-5pm), housed in an award-winning building by Falmouth Docks, contains vessels and exhibitions exploring Britain's seafaring heritage through the ages. The Flotilla Gallery houses more than 40 boats from the national collection.

Boat Trips

In summer, boat trips set out from the Prince of Wales pier to the Helford River and Frenchman's Creek (£8 return), a 500-year-old smuggler's cottage upriver (£6.50 return), and Truro (£8 return, one hour). The pier is lined with boat companies' booths; try **Enterprise Boats** (☎ 374241) or **Cornish Belle** (☎ 01872-580309).

Passenger ferries cross to St Mawes and Flushing from the pier every hour in summer.

Beaches

The nearest beach to town is busy **Gyllyngvase**, a short walk from the town centre, where you'll find plenty of flat sand and a decent beach café. Further along the headland, **Swanpool** and **Maenporth** are usually quieter.

SLEEPING

Falmouth is crammed with B&Bs and hotels, especially along Melvill Rd and Avenue Rd.

Grove Hotel (☎ 319577; www.thegrovehotel.net; Grove Pl; s £30-45, d £60-65; P 🚭) This Georgian residence, formerly the home of a 19th-century sea captain, has had a thorough facelift and now offers plain, great-value rooms in a handy location for the centre of Falmouth and the Maritime Museum.

Dolvean Hotel (☎ 313658; www.dolvean.co.uk; 50 Melvill Rd; s £40-46, d £76-96; P 🚭) If you're looking for clean lines and contemporary style, then you'd be sensible to look elsewhere, but if it's lashings of lace and frilly drapes you're after, then this homely B&B will fit the bill.

St Michael's Hotel (☎ 312707; www.stmichaels-hotel.co.uk; s £49-69, d £69-126, ste £90-145; 🅿 💻 🚭) A programme of refurbishment has turned this venerable hotel into one of Falmouth's most stylish sleeping spots, with a selection of light, unfussy bedrooms decked out with nautical touches, and a beautiful spa and seafood restaurant.

Greenbank Hotel (☎ 312440; www.greenbank-hotel.com; Harbourside; harbour view d £125-215, nonharbour view d £105-150; 🅿 🚭) A little way out of town along the harbourfront, the Greenbank is the grand old dame of Falmouth hotels, with a huge old-fashioned coffee lounge with panoramic views, and plenty of comfy, country-style rooms.

Other recommendations:

Chelsea House (☎ 212300; www.chelseahousehotel.com; 2 Elmslie Rd; s £35, d £42-70; 🅿 🚭)

Rosemullion Hotel (☎ 314690; gail@rosemullionhotel.demon.co.uk; Gyllyngvase Hill; d £45-55; 🅿 🚭) Mock-Tudor hotel split over three floors, uphill from Gyllyngvase Beach.

EATING & DRINKING

Boathouse (☎ 315425; Trevethan Hill; mains £6-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This fantastic gastropub is so laid-back it's almost horizontal. It's especially popular with Falmouth's creative crowd, who come for the generous plates of food, cold beer and chilled-out vibe.

Three Mackerel (☎ 311886; Swanpool Beach; mains £11-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Perched on the cliff above Swanpool Beach, a mile or so from Falmouth town, this light, bright bistro makes the perfect place to watch the sun go down over a plate of tapas and a cold beer. For something more sophisticated, head inside for imaginative seafood and steaming hot mussels.

Hunky Dory (☎ 212997; 46 Arwenack St; mains £12.25-25; 🕑 dinner) This stylish seafood restaurant at the end of Arwenack St has fast gained a reputation as one of the top tables in town. The décor's clean and minimal, with plain wooden tables, muted lighting and terracotta floors, and the menu's stuffed to the gills with local produce, from pan-fried seabass to baked Newlyn cod.

There are plenty of pubs around town, ranging from **Quayside** (☎ 312113; Arwenack St), with outside seating on the harbour, to the nautically-themed **Chain Locker** (☎ 311685; Quay St).

ENTERTAINMENT

Falmouth Arts Centre (☎ 314566; www.falmoutharts.org; Church St) A good arts venue with programmes of theatre, music and independent cinema.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Falmouth is at the end of the branch train line from Truro (£2.30 single, 20 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday).

Bus 7 runs to Penzance (1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday). Bus 88 offers the most frequent service to Truro (1¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday).

The Lizard

☎ 01326

For a glimpse of Cornwall's stormier side, the ink-black cliffs, rugged coves and open heaths of the Lizard Peninsula are hard to beat. This is England's most southerly point, and on a wind-lashed winter's day, it certainly feels a long way from the outside world; in high summer the clifftops burst into life with wildflowers and butterflies, and the remote coves make the perfect place for a spot of secluded swimming. In past centuries the Lizard was at the centre of Cornwall's smuggling industry, and the area is crammed with tales of Cornish 'free-traders' sneaking barrels of liquor and contraband goods under the noses of government Preventive boats. Some smugglers even became local legends – the most notorious was John Carter, the so-called King of Prussia, after whom Prussia Cove near Marazion is named.

For more information visit www.lizard-peninsula.co.uk.

GOONHILLY EARTH STATION

The last thing you'd expect to find in the middle of the Lizard is a radio station, but in fact the vast dishes of the **Goonhilly Earth Station** (☎ 0800 679593; www.goonhilly.bt.com; admission £6.50; 🕑 10am-6pm late May-Sep, 10am-5pm Apr–late May & Oct, 11am-4pm Tue-Sat Nov, Dec & mid-Feb–Mar) make up the largest satellite station on earth. The multimedia visitor centre has lots of interactive exhibits and romps through the last 200 years of telecommunications.

WORTH THE TRIP

Ferryboat Inn (☎ 01326-250625; Helford Passage; mains £5-15) Tucked away along the beautiful Helford Estuary, this riverfront pub is an old favourite with locals and visiting yachties alike. On summer nights the creekside patio is packed with a lively crowd tucking into huge plates of beer-battered fish or triple-decker club sandwiches, and in winter it becomes the quintessential smuggler's pub, perfect for Sunday lunch in front of a roaring log fire.

RIVER HELFORD

Across the north of the Lizard flows the **River Helford**, lined with overhanging oaks and hidden inlets: the perfect smugglers' hideaway. **Frenchman's Creek**, the inspiration for Daphne du Maurier's novel of the same name, can be reached on foot from the car park in Helford village.

On the northern bank of the river is **Trebah** (☎ 250448; www.trebahgarden.co.uk; admission Mar-Oct £5.80, Nov-Feb £3; 🕑 10.30am-6.30pm, last entry 5pm), touted as Cornwall's 'Garden of Dreams'. First planted in 1840, it's one of Cornwall's finest subtropical gardens, dramatically situated in a steep ravine filled with giant rhododendrons, huge Brazilian rhubarb plants and jungle ferns.

The gardens of **Glendurgan** (☎ 250906; glendurgan@nationaltrust.org.uk; admission £5; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat Feb-Oct) were established in the 18th century by the Fox family, who made their fortune importing exotic plants from the New World. There are stunning views of the River Helford, and there's also a 19th-century maze and a secluded beach near Durgan village.

Near Gweek, 6 miles from Helston at the western end of the river, is the **National Seal Sanctuary** (☎ 221361; www.sealsanctuary.co.uk; adult/child £11/8; 🕑 10am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Apr), which cares for sick and orphaned seals washed up along the Cornish coastline before returning them to the wild.

LIZARD POINT & AROUND

Three miles west of Helston is **Porthleven**, another quaint fishing port with excellent beaches nearby. **Cadgwith** is the quintessential Cornish fishing village, with thatched, whitewashed cottages and a small harbour. **Lizard Point** is a 3.5-mile walk along the South West Coast Path.

At the peninsula's tip is the **Lizard Lighthouse** (☎ 290065), built in 1751 and now entirely automated. Lizard Point is one of the most treacherous coastal areas in Cornwall; hundreds of ships have foundered on the peninsula's rocky shores and cliffs over the years. Below the lighthouse, a rough track leads down to the disused lifeboat station and a shingle cove. The views from the surrounding cliff tops are some of the most dramatic in all of Cornwall.

A mile west is the beautiful National Trust beach of **Kynance Cove**, overlooked by towering cliffs and flower-covered headland. Much of the red-green serpentine rock fashionable during the Victorian era was mined here.

SLEEPING

Lizard YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5780; lizard@yha.org.uk; dm £15.50; 🕑 Apr-Oct) Few top-end hotels can boast the kind of spectacular sea view enjoyed by this gloriously situated hostel, in a renovated Victorian hotel right below the lighthouse on Lizard Point.

Coverack YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5780; coverack@yha.org.uk; Coverack; dm £15.50; 🕑 Mar-Oct) Tucked away above the pretty harbour of Coverack, this is another good hostel, with spacious dorms arranged over several floors in an old gentlemen's town house.

Housel Bay Hotel (☎ 290417; www.houselbay.com; The Lizard; d £64-136; 🅿 🚭) By far the most impressive hotel on Lizard Point, this grand gabled manor was constructed by a group of Victorian entrepreneurs to offer its discerning guests the sort of stirring views and luxurious rooms they'd expect from a Cornish country house. A century later it's still a gorgeous place to stay, with plenty of antiques, period rugs and a charming old-world atmosphere.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Lizard's transportation hub is Helston, served by **Truronian** (☎ 01872-273453; www.truronian.co.uk). Bus T1 runs from Truro to Helston (50 minutes, 16 to 20 Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday); for onward connections to the Lizard village, catch bus T34 from the Tesco car park in Helston.

Bus T2 runs from Helston to Goonhilly (20 minutes), Coverack (25 minutes) and St Keverne (40 minutes, 15 daily Monday to Saturday).

A Day Rover ticket valid on all Truronian buses costs £5.

St Michael's Mount

Before the domes of the Eden Project appeared on the scene, Cornwall's best-known landmark was **St Michael's Mount** (NT; ☎ 01736-710507; admission £6; 🕑 10.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, last admission 4.45pm, phone ahead at other times), an island abbey connected to the mainland at Marazion by a cobbled causeway, and completely cut off at high tide.

The first church was believed to have been founded on the island in the 5th century, although most of the present-day abbey derives from a 12th-century chapel constructed by the same Benedictine monks who built Mont St Michel off the Normandy coast in France. The mount became an important place of pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages, and briefly served as a fortress during the Civil War. Since 1659 the mount has been the home of the St Aubyn family, and has been open to the public since 1954 under the stewardship the National Trust.

Highlights include the rococo Gothic drawing room, the original armoury and the 14th-century priory church, but the island is perhaps most famous for its subtropical **gardens** (admission £3), teetering dramatically above the sea.

It's possible to walk across the causeway at low tide, or you can catch a ferry at high tide in summer.

Bus 2 passes Marazion as it travels from Penzance to Falmouth.

Penzance

☎ 01736 / pop 21,168

Perched dramatically above the glittering sweep of Mounts Bay, Penzance has been the last stop on the main line from London since the days of the Great Western Railway, and the town still feels one step removed from the rest of the county. With its hotchpotch of winding streets, old shopping arcades and grand seafront promenade, it feels much more authentic than the polished-up, prettified towns of Padstow and St Ives, and makes an excellent base for exploring the rest of west Cornwall and Land's End.

INFORMATION

Library (☎ 363954; internet access per hr £3; Morrab Rd)

Polyclean Laundrette (☎ 364815; 4 East Tce; per load £3.50; 🕘 7.30am-7.30pm)

Tourist office (☎ 362207; pztic@penwith.gov.uk; Station Approach; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Next to the bus station.

www.penzance.co.uk Useful local guide to Penzance and the surrounding area.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Penlee House Gallery & Museum (☎ 363625; www.penleehouseorg.uk; Morrab Rd; admission £2, free on Sat; 🕘 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) displays a fine range of paintings by artists of the Newlyn School (including Stanhope Forbes) and hosts regular exhibitions exploring the history of art in Cornwall.

The **Trinity House National Lighthouse Centre** (☎ 360077; Wharf Rd; admission £3; 🕘 11am-5pm Apr-Oct) relates the history of the lighthouses that have helped keep ships from harm along the treacherous Cornish coastline.

The busy fishing harbour of **Newlyn**, on the western edge of Penzance, was the centre of the Newlyn School of artists in the late 19th century; the cutting-edge **Newlyn Art Gallery** (☎ 363715; www.newlynartgallery.co.uk) is currently undergoing extensive refurbishment and is set to reopen in 2007.

SLEEPING

Budget

Penzance has lots of low-price B&Bs, especially along Alexandra Rd and Morrab Rd.

Penzance Backpackers (☎ 363836; www.pzbackpack.com; Alexandra Rd; per person dm/d £13/14; 💻) Penzance's only independent hostel is a cheery, welcoming affair, with a few dorms and private rooms squeezed into a converted town house, and a decent-sized lounge and kitchen.

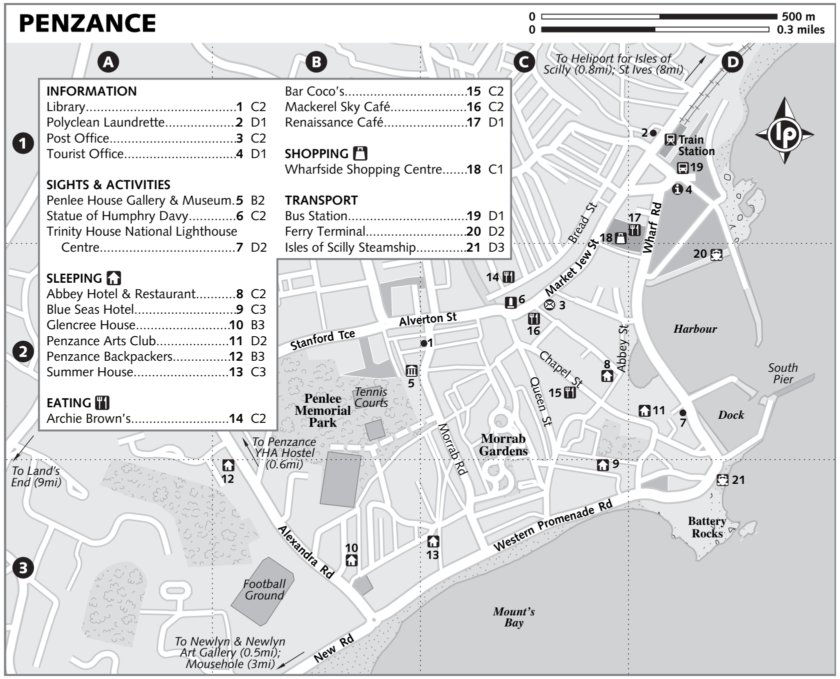
Penzance YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5992; penzance@yha.org.uk; Castle Horneck, Alverton; dm £15.50; 💻) The official YHA hostel in Penzance is housed inside an 18th-century Georgian manor on the outskirts of town, with an onsite café and mostly four- to 10-bed dorms. Buses 5 and 6 run from the bus station to Alverton; it's a 500m walk from the bus stop.

Glencree House (☎ 362026; www.glencreehouse.co.uk; 2 Mennaye Rd; r depending on season £32-50) Fantastic value B&B just a short stroll from the town centre with eight old-fashioned rooms, including a couple with sea views; the huge breakfast includes a choice of smoked butterfly kippers, croissants and fresh fruit.

Midrange & Top End

Blue Seas Hotel (☎ 364744; www.bluehayeshotel-penzance.co.uk; 13 Regent Tce; s £30-35, d £60-80; ☒ 💻) One of several posh B&Bs along Regent's Tce, with plain, pale-toned rooms and a spacious lounge and reading room downstairs. The top-notch breakfast features homemade kedgeree and smoked salmon scrambled eggs.

Penzance Arts Club (☎ 363761; www.penzancearts club.co.uk; Chapel St; s £55-70, d £80-100) Penzance's funkiest place to stay is this fabulous cross between an arts club and boutique B&B. The colour-coded rooms are simple, comfortable and unfussy, but the centre of the action is the downstairs lounge, decked out like a Victorian gentleman's residence, where there are regular gigs, poetry readings, salsa nights and residential arts courses.



PENZANCE

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Isles of Scilly Steamship	21	D3

Summer House (☎ 363744; www.summerhouse-cornwall.com; Cornwall Tce; s £70, d £75-95; 🕘 closed Nov-Mar; P ☒) The grand, Grade II–listed Regency house offers a patchwork of rooms decorated in checks, pinstripes and sunny tones, with tons of original features and carefully chosen furniture; downstairs there's a Mediterranean-themed restaurant and a garden perfect for summer barbecues.

our pick **Abbey Hotel** (☎ 366906; www.theabbeyonline.co.uk; Abbey St; r £130-190) The excellent Abbey Hotel is run by the same husband-and-wife team that owns the Abbey Restaurant next door. The sky-blue 17th-century town house has been refurbished with taste, grace and plenty of period furniture – quirky antiques and topsy-turvy layouts are the order of the day.

EATING

Bar Coco's (☎ 350222; 13 Chapel St; tapas £2-6; 🕘 closed Sun) The Mediterranean hits Penzance at this laid-back restaurant and tapas bar, where you can tuck into Provençal fish soup and seared tuna or just sit back with an ice-cold Sol and a bowl of marinated olives.

Archie Brown's (☎ 362828; Bread St; mains £3-6; 🕘 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This much-loved veggie/vegan café is on the 1st floor above a health-food shop, and serves up hearty portions of old veggie faves including homity pie, hot chilli and crumbly carrot cake.

Renaissance Café (☎ 366277; 6 Wharfside Shopping Centre; mains £5-12; 🕘 lunch & dinner) A continental-style café-bar tucked away in the Wharfside shopping centre, with an excellent menu packed with club sandwiches, burgers and seafood specials, and fine views across Mount's Bay.

Mackerel Sky Café (☎ 366866; 45 New St; mains £7-10; 🕘 lunch Tue-Sat) Next door to the upmarket Harris' restaurant, this new café is a cosy spot for a huge open sandwich or a gourmet burger, but also serves up fresh fish dishes and quite possibly the frothiest cappuccinos in Penzance.

Abbey Restaurant (☎ 330680; Abbey St; 2/3 courses £18/23; 🕘 lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, phone

TOP FIVE GARDENS

- Glendurgan – River Helford (p323)
- Heligan – near Mevagissey (p320)
- Lanhydrock – near Bodmin (p319)
- Trebah – River Helford (p323)
- Trelissick – near Truro (p317)

Check out www.gardensofcornwall.com for further tips.

ahead at other times) One of Cornwall's most acclaimed restaurants, run by the renowned chef Ben Tunnicliffe. Upstairs the restaurant serves cutting-edge British cuisine in a contemporary dining room; downstairs the boldly-coloured cellar bar serves all the aperitifs and digestifs you could wish for.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

National Express coaches travel to London (£35.50, nine hours, eight daily) via Exeter (£22, five hours, two daily), sometimes changing at Plymouth (£6.50, 3½ hours, seven daily). For buses to Land's End, see right.

Train

There are regular services to Penzance from London Paddington (£108, six hours, eight daily) via Truro. There are frequent trains from Penzance to St Ives (£4.40, 20 minutes, hourly), with connections at St Erth.

WEST CORNWALL

West Cornwall contains some of the county's wildest scenery, a classic landscape of sea-battered cliffs, churning surf, crumbling mine-workings and wheeling gulls. The West Penwith area was one of the oldest Celtic settlements in Cornwall, and the area is littered with prehistoric sites.

Mousehole

☎ 01736

The compact harbour of Mousehole was once at the heart of Cornwall's thriving pilchard industry, but these days it's best known for its colourful Christmas lights, and as the location for a much-loved local children's story called *The Mousehole Cat*.

The **Old Coastguard** (☎ 731222; www.oldcoastguardhotel.co.uk; depending on season r £80-160) is a swish, modernised hotel decorated with a healthy dose of designer flair. Deep sofas, smart pine floors and neutral colours characterise the rooms, half of which are in a detached lodge by the harbour; the sunlit restaurant has beautiful bay views and specialises, as you might expect, in fantastic seafood.

Bus 6 runs the 20-minute journey to Penzance half-hourly.

Minack Theatre

Surely the world's most spectacularly located theatre, the **Minack** (☎ 01736-810181; www.minack.com; tickets from £7.50) is carved into the cliffs overlooking Porthcurno Bay. The **visitor centre** (admission £3; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) recounts the story of Rowena Cade, the indomitable local woman who originally conceived the theatre and oversaw it until her death in 1983. The theatre's 17-week season runs from mid-May to mid-September – though aficionados always bring umbrellas and blankets in case the British weather should take centre stage. The visitor centre is closed when there's a matinée.

The Minack is above the beautiful beach of Porthcurno, 3 miles from Land's End and 9 miles from Penzance. Bus 345 from Penzance to Land's End stops at Porthcurno, Monday to Friday.

Land's End

Last stop on the journey from John o'Groats is Land's End, where the crumbling granite cliffs of west Cornwall tumble into the booming Atlantic surf. It's one of Britain's most dramatic and unforgettable locations, which makes the decision to build the monumentally tacky **Legendary Land's End** (☎ 0870 458 0099; www.landsend-landmark.co.uk; admission £10; 🕑 10am-5pm summer, 10am-3pm winter) theme park all the more inexplicable. Take our advice – skip the ragtag collection of fibreglass models and half-hearted multimedia shows and take an exhilarating clifftop stroll along the headland instead. On a clear day it's possible to see all the way to the Isles of Scilly, 28 miles out to sea.

Land's End is 9 miles from Penzance and 886 miles from John o'Groats. Bus 1 runs around the coast to St Ives (1½ hours) and Penzance (2½ hours, five daily) – for some reason it becomes bus 300 in the opposite direction. The twice-daily bus 345 offers a quicker service straight to Penzance.

St Just-in-Penwith

☎ 01736 / pop 1890

There's not much to see around the grey-granite settlement of St Just, 6 miles north of Land's End, but a century or so ago this was a hub of activity for the local tin- and copper-mining industry. The old **Geevor Tin Mine** (☎ 788662; www.geevor.com; admission £7.50; 🕑 9am-5pm Sun-Fri Easter-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) at Pendeen, north of St Just, finally closed in 1990, and now offers tours of the underground shafts every hour in summer, offering an amazing insight into the dark and dangerous conditions in which Cornwall's miners once worked.

St Just is also the site of the **Plen-an-gwary**, an open-air auditorium, which was once used to stage outdoor theatre and Cornish mystery plays.

Land's End YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5906; Letcha Vean; dm £14; 🕑 Easter-Oct) is in an isolated spot half a mile south of the village, and makes an ideal spot for keen bird-watchers and walkers on the coast path. It's definitely a no-frills hostel, with smallish dorms and a basic kitchen, but it's ideal if you're after some peace and quiet.

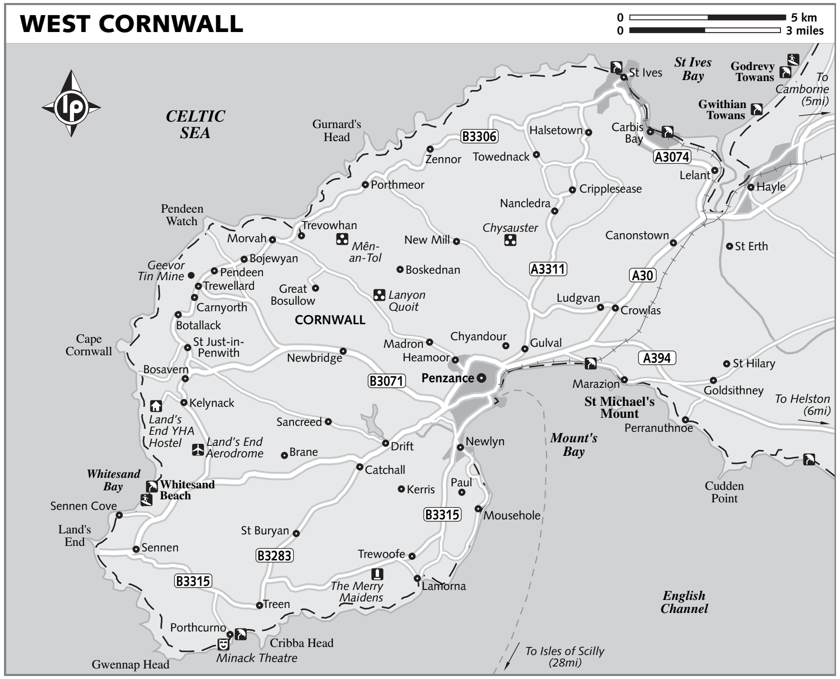
Bus 17 travels from St Ives via Penzance every half-hour Monday to Saturday.

Zennor

☎ 01736 / pop 217

A stunning 6-mile stretch of the South West Coast Path runs from St Ives to the windswept village of Zennor, where DH Lawrence wrote much of *Women in Love*. **St Senara's Church** dates from at least 1150. Look for the carved Mermaid Chair; legend tells of a beautiful, mysterious woman who lured a chorister into the sea at Mermaid's Cove, where you can still hear them singing.

The extraordinary **Wayside Folk Museum** (☎ 796945; admission £3; 🕑 10.30am-5pm Sun-Fri May-Sep, 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Apr & Oct) started out as a private collection of local artefacts gathered together by Colonel 'Freddie' Hirst in the 1930s, and over the last 70 years has grown into the country's most fascinating folk museum. The treasure-trove of exhibits here includes original equipment belonging to local blacksmiths, miners and cobblers, an 18th-century kitchen, two reclaimed watermills and an extensive photographic archive


WEST CORNWALL
0 5 km
0 3 miles
CELTIC SEA
St Ives
St Ives Bay
Godrevy Towans
To Camborne (5mi)
Gwithian Towans
Gurnard's Head
B3306
Halsetown
Carbis Bay
A3074
Zennor
Towednack
Lelant
Hayle
Porthmeor
Cripplesease
Nancledra
Pendeen Watch
Trevowhan
Chysauster
Canonstown
Morvah
Mên-an-Tol
New Mill
St Erth
Geevor Tin Mine
Bojewyan
Pendeen
Boskednan
A3311
A30
Trewellard
Great Bosullow
Lanyon Quoit
Ludgvan
Crowlas
Carnyorth
Botallack
CORNWALL
Cape Cornwall
St Just-in-Penwith
Madron
Chyandour
Gulval
Newbridge
Heamoor
A394
St Hilary
Bosavern
B3071
Penzance
Marazion
Goldsithney
St Michael's Mount
To Helston (6mi)
Kelynack
Land's End YHA Hostel
Sancreed
Perranuthnoe
Land's End Aerodrome
Drift
Newlyn
Mount's Bay
Brane
Whitesand Bay
Whitesand Beach
Catchall
Kerris
Paul
Cudden Point
Sennen Cove
B3315
Mousehole
Land's End
Sennen
St Buryan
B3283
Trewoofe
B3315
The Merry Maidens
Lamorna
Treen
English Channel
Porthcurno
Cribba Head
Minack Theatre
Gwennap Head
To Isles of Scilly (28mi)

of the local area – it really has to be seen to be believed.

The only place to stay locally is the **Old Chapel Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 798307; dm/d £12/40; Ⓟ), handily placed along the coast path. Inside it's smart, modern and efficient, with dorm rooms and a great-value café downstairs.

DH Lawrence's favourite local while he lived on the Zennor coastline was the **Tinner's Arms** (☎ 792697; lunch from £7-10), a classic Cornish inn with a rambling, atmospheric main bar sheltering under a slate roof. Pub lunches and local ale are served either inside or on the sea-view patio.

From St Ives, catch bus 300 (20 minutes, five daily) or bus 343 (20 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday).

St Ives

☎ **01736 / pop 9870**

Tucked into the coastline of a glittering arc-shaped bay, St Ives was once one of the county's busiest pilchard-fishing harbours, but it's better known these days for its long-standing reputation as the centre of the Cornish arts scene. From the old harbour, cobbled alleyways and switchback lanes lead uphill into a jumble of buzzy galleries, cafés and brasseries, catering for the thousands of summertime visitors who arrive every year to sample the artistic atmosphere for themselves. It makes for an intriguing mix, where boutique chic meets the old-fashioned British seaside, and while the high-season traffic can certainly take the shine off things, St Ives is still an essential stop on any Cornish grand tour.

INFORMATION

Library (☎ 795377; 1 Gabriel St; internet access per hr £3)

Post office (☎ 795004; Tregenna Pl; ⏰ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

stives-cornwall.co.uk Official town website with accommodation and activity guides.

Tourist office (☎ 796297; ivtic@penwith.gov.uk; Street-an-Pol; ⏰ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Inside the Guildhall.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Tate St Ives

The artwork almost takes second place to the surroundings at the stunning **Tate St Ives** (☎ 796226; www.tate.org.uk/stives; Porthmeor Beach; admission £5.75, joint ticket with Barbara Hepworth Museum £8.75; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), which hovers like a white concrete curl above Porthmeor Beach. Built in 1993, the gallery contains work by celebrated local artists, including Terry Frost, Patrick Heron and Barbara Hepworth, and hosts regular special exhibitions. On the top floor there's a stylish café-bar with the best sea views in town.

There are plenty more art galleries to discover around town – perhaps the most interesting is the **Sloop Craft Centre**, just off the harbour, where you'll find a treasure-trove of tiny artists' studios selling everything from handmade jewellery to driftwood furniture.

Barbara Hepworth Museum & Sculpture Garden

Barbara Hepworth was one of the leading abstract sculptors of the 20th century, and a key figure in the St Ives art scene, so it seems fitting that her former studio has been transformed into a moving archive and **museum** (☎ 796226; www.tate.org.uk/stives; Barnoon Hill; admission £4.75, joint ticket with Tate St Ives £8.75; ⏰ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb). The studio itself has remained almost untouched since her death in a fire in 1975, and the adjoining garden contains some of her most famous sculptures. Hepworth's work is scattered throughout St Ives; look for her sculptures outside the Guildhall and inside the 15th-century parish church of St Ia.

St Ives Museum

Housed in a pier-side building variously used as a pilchard-packing factory, laundry, cinema, sailor's mission and copper mine, the **heritage museum** (☎ 796005; admission £1.50; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sat Mar-Oct) contains local artefacts relating to blacksmithery, fishing and shipwrecks.

Beaches

The largest town beaches are **Porthmeor** and **Porthminster**, but the tiny cove of **Porthgwidden** is also popular. Nearby, the pre-14th-century **Chapel of St Nicholas**, patron saint of children and sailors, is the oldest (and smallest) church in St Ives. **Carbis Bay**, to the southeast, is popular with families and sun-seekers.

On the opposite side of the bay from St Ives, the receding tide reveals over 3 miles of golden beach at **Gwithian** and **Godrevy Towans**, both popular spots for kiteboarders and surfers. The lighthouse just offshore at Godrevy was the inspiration for Virginia Woolf's classic stream-of-consciousness novel *To The Lighthouse*.

Several places on Porthmeor Beach and Fore St rent wetsuits and surfboards; try **Windansea** (☎ 794830; 25 Fore St).

Boat Trips

Sea-fishing trips and coastal cruises to the grey-seal colony on Seal Island (£8) are run by the **St Ives Pleasure Boat Association** (☎ 01736-796080, 07712-386162) and several other operators on the harbour.

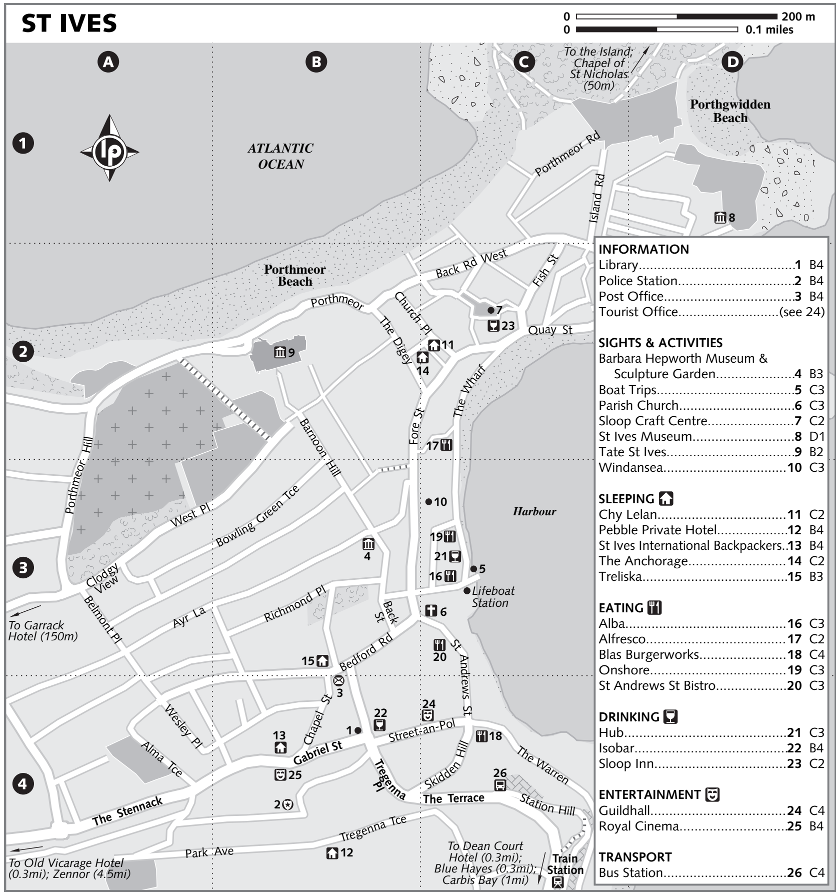
SLEEPING

Budget

St Ives International Backpackers (☎ 799444; www.backpackers.co.uk/st-ives; The Stennack; dm depending on season £11-17; 💻) This grungy old hostel, housed in an old chapel school, could do with some serious spring cleaning, but if you don't mind cramped rooms and the odd spot of peeling paintwork, it makes a good budget base for exploring the town.

Anchorage (☎ 797135; 5 Bunkers Hill; info@theanchoragebandb.co.uk; s £30-35, d £60-70; 🚭) This 18th-century cob cottage just off the main street is packed with old-world atmosphere – think oak beams, rough stone walls and a maze of snug, tiny rooms leading off the low-ceilinged corridors.

Chy Lelan (☎ 797560; Bunkers Hill; www.chylelan.co.uk; d £50-60; 🚭) Just up the hill from the Anchorage, two old fishermen's cottages now provide simple, plain B&B rooms, with views onto the street or across the town's slate-covered rooftops.



INFORMATION		
Library	**1**	B4
Police Station	**2**	B4
Post Office	**3**	B4
Tourist Office	(see 24)	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Barbara Hepworth Museum & Sculpture Garden	**4**	B3
Boat Trips	**5**	C3
Parish Church	**6**	C3
Sloop Craft Centre	**7**	C2
St Ives Museum	**8**	D1
Tate St Ives	**9**	B2
Windansea	**10**	C3
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Pebble Private Hotel	**12**	B4
St Ives International Backpackers	**13**	B4
The Anchorage	**14**	C2
Treliska	**15**	B3
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Alba	**16**	C3
Alfresco	**17**	C2
Blas Burgerworks	**18**	C4
Onshore	**19**	C3
St Andrews St Bistro	**20**	C3
DRINKING		
Hub	**21**	C3
Isobar	**22**	B4
Sloop Inn	**23**	C2
ENTERTAINMENT		
Guildhall	**24**	C4
Royal Cinema	**25**	B4
TRANSPORT		
Bus Station	**26**	C4

ANCIENT CORNWALL

Like many other areas of Celtic Britain, Cornwall is strewn with reminders of its ancient past. The area between St Just and St Ives is dotted with dolmens, menhirs and mysterious stone circles – if prehistory is your thing, track down **Lanyon Quoit** (a table-shaped dolmen between Madron and Morvah), the **Mên-an-Tol stone** (a ring-shaped stone near Madron), the **Merry Maidens** (Cornwall's most complete stone circle, near Trewoofe) and **Chysauster Iron Age Village** (☎ 07831-757934; adult £2.40; 🕒 10-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct), the most complete prehistoric settlement in Cornwall.

Perhaps the most impressive ancient monument in Cornwall is the **Hurlers**, a series of stone circles near the village of Minions on Bodmin Moor. Legend has it that the stones were once local men who were turned to stone for playing the local game of hurling on the Sabbath. Around 1.5km across the moor is the **Cheesewring**, a 20-foot stack of stones balanced on top of each other. Although it looks like it's manmade, in fact it's an entirely natural formation that's been weathered down by the elements over several million years.

Midrange & Top End

Pebble Private Hotel (☎ 794168; www.pebble-hotel.co.uk; 4 Park Ave; s £30-42, d £60-88; ⊠) Located up on the steep hillside above town, this gorgeous and very contemporary B&B comes as a breath of fresh air, with a choice of imaginatively decorated rooms kitted out in technicolour tones, funky patterns and crazy-shaped mirrors.

Treliska (☎ 797678; treliska@connexions.co.uk; 3 Bedford Rd; ⊠) Another beautifully finished B&B that's a world away from chintzy curtains and flock wallpaper – here it's all clean lines, chrome bath-taps and elegantly understated pine furniture.

Old Vicarage Hotel (☎ 796124; www.oldvicaragehotel.com; Parc-an-Creet; s/d £51/68; 🅿 ⊠) A former rectory in lovely landscaped gardens, set back from the tourist-thronged streets of the town centre, and decorated throughout in mock-Victorian style. Most impressive is the mahogany and red velvet lounge-bar, although the bedrooms themselves aren't quite as striking.

Dean Court Hotel (☎ 796023; www.deancourthotel.com; Trelyon Ave; d £80-104; 🅿) A short walk uphill from the town centre, this upmarket six-room hotel in a double-fronted Victorian town house commands panoramic views across the bay. All the bedrooms are smartly furnished with fluffy beds and sitting areas, but the sea-view ones are the pick of the bunch.

Blue Hayes (☎ 797129; www.blue-hayes.co.uk; Trelyon Ave; r £140-170; 🅿 ⊠) There are a couple of seriously grand country hotels around town, but for something less ostentatious try this boutique beauty, where you'll find five luxurious cream-coloured suites (including one with its own private roof patio) and a balustraded breakfast terrace overlooking the bay.

EATING

St Ives has almost as many restaurants and brasseries as Padstow. Most are dotted along the harbourfront, but the back lanes can turn up some surprising treats too.

Blas Burgerworks (☎ 797272; The Warren; burgers £4-8; 🕒 lunch) The humble burger becomes a work of art at this fantastic new diner, where the gourmet creations range from beetburgers in sunflower baps to black-bean burgers livened up with lashings of chilli sauce.

Onshore (☎ 796000; The Wharf; pizzas £7-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Gourmet pizzas cooked to perfection in a wood-fired oven are the mainstay at this lively chrome-and-glass pizzeria, next door to the Hub.

our pick **St Andrews Street Bistro** (☎ 797074; 16 Andrews St; mains £9-15; 🕒 lunch Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) The latest entry on the St Ives eating scene is this eclectic new bistro, serving up British classics fused with North African flavours in a boho dining room filled with Moroccan rugs, murals and *objets d'art*.

Alfresco (☎ 793737; The Wharf; mains £10-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) On a fine summer's day this tiny wharfside bistro is the only place to be, with sliding doors that open onto the harbour and a blackboard menu that takes its cue from the daily catch.

Alba (☎ 797222; Old Lifeboat House; mains £14-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) The award-winning Alba is still one of the top places for seafood on the harbourfront, with a split-level dining room and sumptuous seafood such as pan-fried seabass and fillet of john dory with spring vegetables.

DRINKING

Hub (☎ 799099; The Wharf; 🕒 10am-late) This harbourfront café-bar opens late into the night, but makes a good spot for morning coffee too, with a trendy chocolate-coloured interior and a fine sea-view aspect.

Isobar (☎ 796042; Tregenna Pl; 🕒 to 2am) St Ives's main nightspot boasts a pared-back bar on the ground floor and a hot-and-sweaty club upstairs, with regular funk, house and techno nights, and the odd cheesy disc thrown in for good measure.

Sloop Inn (☎ 796584; The Wharf) A classic old fishermen's boozer, complete with low ceilings, tankards behind the bar and a comprehensive selection of Cornish ales.

ENTERTAINMENT

Royal Cinema (☎ 796843; www.merlincinemas.co.uk; The Stennack) Shows new films and often has cheap matinées.

Guildhall (☎ 796888; 1 Street-An-Pol) Regular programmes of music and theatre, especially during the St Ives September Festival.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express runs coaches to London (£35.50, nine hours, four daily), Plymouth (£6.50, three hours, four daily) and most local towns. Local First buses 16 and 17/17A/17B regularly connect St Ives with Penzance; the circular bus 300 travels to Land's End en route.

St Ives is on a scenic branch train line from St Erth (£2.20, 20 minutes, hourly), on the main London–Penzance line via Truro.

NORTH CORNWALL

The north Cornish coast is where the rolling grey Atlantic smacks hard into the county's granite cliffs, and for many people it's the quintessential Cornish landscape – a wild mix of grassy headlands, craggy bluffs and pounding surf. It's also where you'll find the county's best beaches and biggest waves.

St Agnes & Perranporth

The secluded beaches and reliable swells around the coastal towns of St Agnes and Porthtowan are popular with surfers and holidaymakers alike. The tiny National Trust cove of **Chapel Porth**, tucked away at the bottom of a beautiful river valley, is a particularly fine spot; a dramatic coast path travels along the clifftops to the abandoned mine at **Wheal Coates** and breathtaking views at **Tubby's Head**.

North of St Agnes is the busy beach town of Perranporth, packed to bursting with scarlet-faced holidaymakers in summer and all but deserted in the winter months. The beach at Perranporth (sometimes referred to as **Perran Sands**) is one of the north coast's finest stretches of sand, and is popular with surfers, kiteboarders and swimmers alike, especially during the summer months

SLEEPING, EATING & DRINKING

Driftwood Spars (☎ 01872-552428; www.driftwoodspars.com; d £82-94; 🅿 ⊠) A lively beachside pub at Trevaunance Cove near St Agnes, with 15 delightful upstairs rooms, many of which have sea views and attractive nautical touches.

Rose-in-Vale Hotel (☎ 01872-552202; www.rose-in-vale-hotel.co.uk; Mithian; d from £130; 🅿 ⊠ 🏊) A grand country-house hotel set in flower-filled grounds 2 miles from St Agnes, with 18 supremely tasteful rooms and a smart country restaurant.

Blue Bar (☎ 01209-890329; www.blue-bar.co.uk; Porthtowan; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Sun) One of the favourite hangouts for Cornwall's beach crowd, with a bright surf-style interior and a sea-view patio overlooking Porthtowan Beach. Burgers, sandwiches and salads are on the menu, and there's live music and DJs at weekends.

Watering Hole (☎ 01872-572888; Perranporth Beach) One of the liveliest beach bars on the north coast, with outside tables on the sand, regular bands and a buzzy surf-shack vibe.

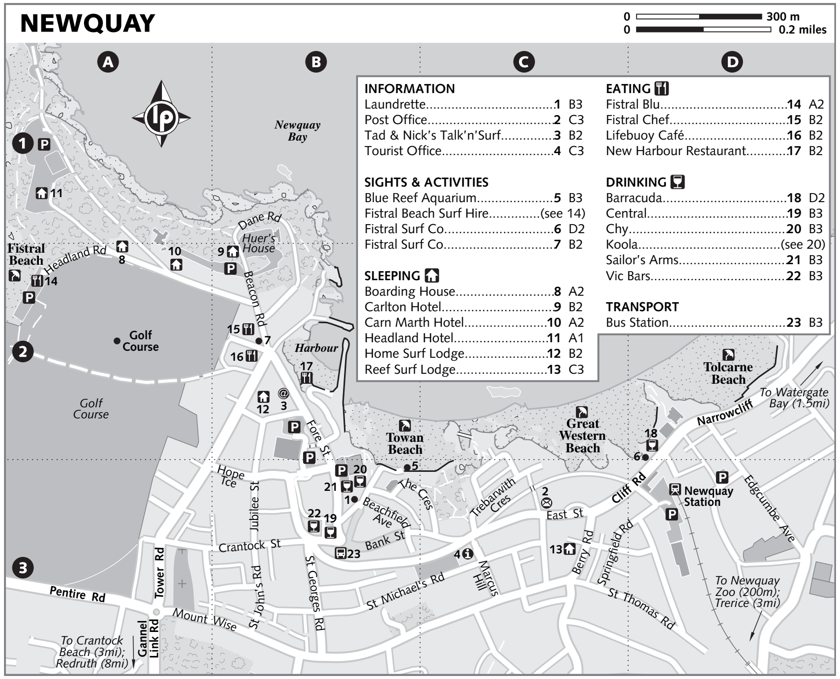
GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 557 travels along the north coast from Newquay to St Ives once in each direction Sunday to Friday, stopping at St Agnes and Perranporth en route. Bus T1 travels from Truro (40 minutes, hourly) to St Agnes, but only a few daily buses travel on to Perranporth (15 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday).

Newquay

☎ 01637 / pop 19,423

If Padstow is Cornwall's Cannes, then Newquay is its Costa del Sol. Perched on the cliffs above a cluster of white-sand beaches, and packed with enough pubs, bars and dodgy clubs to give Ibiza a run for its money, it's become the summer venue of choice for beer boys, beach bums and surf addicts alike, all of whom descend on the town in droves. It's also the unofficial capital of Cornish surfing,


NEWQUAY
0 300 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
Newquay Bay
Fistral Beach
Headland Rd
Dane Rd
Huer's House
Beacon Rd
Harbour
Golf Course
Golf Course
Towan Beach
Great Western Beach
Tolcarne Beach
To Watergate Bay (1.5mi)
Narrowcliff
Fore St
Hope Tce
Jubilee St
Crantock St
Beachfield Ave
The Cres
Trebarwith Cres
Bank St
East St
Cliff Rd
Newquay Station
Edgcumbe Ave
Berry Rd
Springfield Rd
St Thomas Rd
To Newquay Zoo (200m); Trerice (3mi)
Marcus Hill
St Michael's Rd
St Georges Rd
St John's Rd
Tower Rd
Pentire Rd
Mount Wise
Gannel Link Rd
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Fistral Beach Surf Hire (see 14)
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Carlton Hotel 9 B2
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Fistral Blu 14 A2
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Koola (see 20)
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TRANSPORT
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and if you're looking to learn how to brave the waves, this is the place to do it.

INFORMATION

Laundrette (☎ 875901; 1 Beach Pde, Beach Rd)
Tad & Nick's Talk'n'Surf (☎ 874868; 72 Fore St; internet access per hr £3; 🕑 10am-6pm)
Tourist office (☎ 854020; www.newquay.co.uk; Marcus Hill; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Newquay's trump card is its spectacular location near some of the best beaches on the north coast. **Fistral**, west of Towan Head, is England's best-known surfing beach, and the venue for the annual Boardmasters surfing festival. Below town are **Great Western** and **Towan**, and a little further up the coast you'll find Tolcarne, Lusty Glaze and Porth. All the beaches are good for swimming and supervised by lifeguards in summer.

Blue Reef Aquarium (☎ 878134; www.bluereefaquarium.co.uk; Towan Promenade; admission £5.95; 🕑 10am-5pm) on Towan Beach has a selection of weird and wonderful underwater characters, including jellyfish, sea horses, octopi and rays; several of the tanks have open tops allowing you to touch the fish.

There are lots more beautiful beaches to discover around Newquay. Three miles to the southwest is **Crantock**, sandwiched between the twin headlands of East and West Pentire, and a little further west is family-friendly **Holywell Bay**. Just east of Newquay is **Watergate Bay**, where you'll find a glorious sandy beach and an excellent outdoor activities centre (see opposite). The stately rock towers of **Bedruthan Steps** are a few miles further east towards Padstow.

SLEEPING

Budget

There are plenty of surf lodges in Newquay – the best ones have secure board storage and links with local surf schools.

Reef Surf Lodge (☎ 879058; www.reefsurflodge.info; 10-12 Berry Rd; dm £15-29.50; 💻) This place is a quantum leap from your average surf lodge – forget saggy beds and overcrowded dorms, here it's all plasma-screen TVs, cappuccino machines and groovy modern furniture. There's a great onsite bar, and surfing courses are provided by the in-house Reef Surf School (www.reefsurfschool.com).

Home Surf Lodge (☎ 873387; www.homesurflodge.co.uk; 18 Tower Rd; dm £16-20; 💻) Another popular lodge near the town centre, with basic dorm rooms, free internet access and a pleasant DVD lounge and licensed bar.

Boarding House (☎ 873258; www.theboardinghouse.co.uk; 32 Headland Rd; dm £18-25; 💻) This stylish surf lodge is in a fantastic location near Fistral Beach. Rooms are clean and modern; downstairs there's a lively bar decorated with potted plants and Indonesian furniture, and a fantastic wooden-decked terrace overlooking the golf course and Trevose Head.

Midrange & Top End

Carlton Hotel (☎ 872658; www.carltonhotelnewquay.co.uk; 6 Dane Rd; d £60-70; P ⊠) This sumptuous B&B offers nine cream-themed bedrooms, complete with huge, plush beds, country prints and DVD players in every room.

Carnmarth Hotel (☎ 872519; www.carnmarth.com; Headland Rd; d depending on season £65-100) This old package-holiday hotel is in the midst of transforming itself into Newquay's first boutique hotel. The rooms themselves are still on the tired side, although most have decent sea views – at the moment the highlight is the fantastic steel-and-glass bar and panoramic drinks terrace. One to watch.

Headland Hotel (☎ 872211; www.headlandhotel.co.uk; Fistral Beach; d £80-302; P ⊠ 💻 🏊) The grand old lady of Newquay hotels is this fabulous red-brick pile perched above Fistral Beach. The impeccable rooms range from budget singles to ornate sea-view suites, and facilities include a brace of swimming pools, tennis courts and a nine-hole golf course.

EATING

Lifebuoy Café (☎ 878076; Lower Tower Rd; mains £4.50-12) This reliable old café is an excellent spot for breakfast smoothies and coffee, and baguettes, burgers and fresh salads at lunchtime.

Fistral Chef (☎ 850718; 2 Beacon Rd; breakfasts £2-6, mains £6-10; 🕑 breakfast daily, dinner in summer) This popular new café champions its all-day breakfast as the best in town. On summer nights there's also a Thai-themed evening menu, with a BYO wine policy.

Fistral Blu (☎ 879444; Fistral Beach; mains £7-19; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This impressive glass-fronted restaurant on Fistral Beach experiments with Thai and Mediterranean flavours, as well as Cornish standards such as fish pie and local scallops. For something more relaxed, you can grab sandwiches and burgers at the informal café downstairs.

New Harbour Restaurant (☎ 874062; South Quay Hill; mains £10-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) In a lovely spot beside the old harbour, this relaxed restaurant is a fine place to escape the crowds along Newquay's main drag. Fish and seafood are the menu's mainstays – think crab claws, homemade fishcakes and skate wing.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Chy (☎ 873415; www.the-chy.co.uk; 12 Beach Rd) This sophisticated café-bar is a world away from most of the dodgy clubs and pubs around Newquay, with plenty of stripped wood, chrome fixtures and plush sofas, not to mention a fantastic panoramic terrace.

Koola (☎ 873415; www.thekoola.com; 12 Beach Rd) Underneath the Chy, the Koola is the venue of choice for connoisseur clubbers, with regular house, Latin, and drum'n'bass nights, and a regular slot for local DJs, Jelly Jazz.

SURF'S UP

Newquay is literally brimming over with surf schools, offering everything from half-day taster lessons (£25 to £30) to full-blown multiday 'surfaris' (from £130). Reputable operators include the **British Surfing Association** (BSA; ☎ 850737; Fistral Beach), **Tolcarne Beach** (☎ 851487; www.nationalsurfingcentre.com), **Reef Surf School** (☎ 879059; www.reefsurfschool.com; Great Western Beach) and the **Extreme Academy** (☎ 860840; www.extremeacademy.co.uk; Watergate Bay) on Watergate Bay, which also offers lessons in kitebuggying, mountainboarding and waveskiing. If you choose another school, make sure the instructors are certified by the BSA.

Boards (£10/25/45 for one/three/seven days) and wetsuits (£5/12/25 for one/three/seven days) can be hired from **Fistral Surf Co** (☎ 850808; 19 Cliff Rd; 🕑 9am-6pm) or **Fistral Beach Surf Hire** (☎ 850584; Fistral Beach).

And for seasoned surfers looking for a few more thrills and spills, how about a spot of kitesurfing? Contact **Mobius Kite School** (☎ 831383; Cubert; www.mobiusonline.co.uk).

WORTH THE TRIP

Fifteen Cornwall (☎ 01637-861000; www.fifteencornwall.com; Watergate Bay; 6-course dinner menu £50; ⏰ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fresh from his campaign to change the stomach-churning eating habits of Britain's school kids, everyone's favourite mockney chef Jamie Oliver recently opened the second branch of his Fifteen restaurant in a stunning location on Watergate Bay. Giving underprivileged Cornish youngsters an opportunity to work and train in a professional restaurant environment while turning out top-quality cooking, Fifteen is currently the hottest ticket in the county. If you can bag a table, the beach views, electric atmosphere and contemporary cooking won't disappoint.

Central (☎ 878310; 11 Central Sq) As its name suggests, this popular pre-club pub is right in the heart of town, and the outside patio is always overflowing on warm summer nights.

Other options:

Vic Bars (☎ 872671; King St) Cavernous pub with regular bands on Friday and Saturday night.

Barracuda (☎ 875800; 27-29 Cliff Rd) One of the largest clubs in town, with big-name DJs on weekends.

Sailor's Arms (☎ 872838; Fore St) Pub-club playing cheesy house and chunky choons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express has direct buses to London (£35.50, seven hours, five daily), Plymouth (£5.70, 1½ hours, four daily) and Penzance (£5, 1¾ hours, two daily).

There are trains every couple of hours between Newquay and Par (£4.80 single, 45 minutes), on the main London–Penzance line.

Trerice

Built in 1751, the charming Elizabethan manor of **Trerice** (NT; ☎ 01637-875404; admission £6; ⏰ 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Mar-Oct, gardens from 10.30am) is famous for the elaborate barrel-roofed ceiling of the Great Chamber, but has plenty of other intriguing features, including ornate fireplaces, original plasterwork and a fine collection of period furniture. There's also an amusing lawn-mower museum in the barn, with over 100 grass-cutters going back over a century.

Trerice is 3 miles southeast of Newquay. Bus 526 runs from Newquay to Kestle Mill, about a mile from the manor house.

Padstow

☎ 01841 / pop 3162

Wind the clock back a decade or two and Padstow was just another quiet fishing village along Cornwall's north coast, but over recent years this little harbour has been transformed into the capital of Cornish cuisine. The transformation is almost entirely due to the efforts of one man, celebrity chef Rick Stein, who opened his first seafood restaurant on the harbourside back in the mid-'70s and has since expanded his property portfolio with a second café, a couple of hotels, a seafood school, a delicatessen and even a fish and chip shop. Hardly surprising, then, that the locals often wryly refer to the town as 'Pad-stein' – but despite its chichi provenance, it's still a pretty place to visit, with a cluster of cafés and fishermen's cottages nestled around its old harbour.

The **tourist office** (☎ 533449; www.padstowlive.com; North Quay; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) charges £3 to book accommodation.

Much favoured by directors of costume dramas, the stately manor house of **Prideaux Place** (☎ 532411; admission £6; ⏰ 12.30-4pm Sun-Thu Easter Sun–mid-Apr & mid-May–Oct) above the village was built by the Prideaux-Brune family (who still reside here), purportedly descendants of William the Conqueror.

The disused Padstow to Bodmin railway line now forms the **Camel Trail**, one of Cornwall's most popular cycling tracks. The trail starts in Padstow and runs east through Wadebridge (5.75 miles), Bodmin (11 miles) and beyond. Bikes can be hired from **Padstow Cycle Hire** (☎ 533533; www.padstowcyclehire.com; South Quay; ⏰ 9am-5pm) and **Brinhams** (☎ 532594; South Quay; ⏰ 9am-5pm) for around £10 to £15 per day.

The **Jubilee Queen** (☎ 521093) offers boat trips (adults £6) around the bay and offshore islands, leaving from the harbourside.

Padstow is surrounded by some excellent beaches, including **Polzeath** and **Treyarnon Bay**.

SLEEPING

Treyarnon Bay YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6076; Tregonnan; dm £15.50; P 🚭 💻) Possibly one of the best-situated hostels in Cornwall, in a fantastic headland position above Treyarnon Bay, 4.5 miles west of Padstow. There's a café, kitchen and barbecue area and the beach is just a stone's throw away. Bus 556 from Padstow stops at nearby Constantine several times daily.

Althea Library (☎ 532717; www.althealibrary.co.uk; 27 High St; d £78-110; P 🚭) One of the nicest B&Bs in central Padstow, with a couple of cosy, tasteful rooms tucked away on the 1st floor of the listed cottage, and a more expensive 'nook suite'. Guests have use of a pretty little A-frame lounge, complete with CD player and board games, and the Aga-cooked breakfasts will keep you going for hours.

Cross House Hotel (☎ 532391; Church St; d £90-125; P 🚭) A short stroll uphill from the harbour brings you to this imposing Georgian town house, with a range of traditionally styled bedrooms decorated with rich bedspreads and heavy curtains – the more expensive even have plasma-screen TVs and the odd piece of antique furniture.

St Ervan Manor (☎ 540255; www.stervanmanor.co.uk; St Ervan; r £140-245; P 🚭) This award-winning B&B is really a country-house hotel in disguise, with five beautifully appointed bedrooms decorated in sumptuous shades and polished furniture, and a truly palatial garden cottage complete with a regal lounge and private patioed garden.

EATING

Rojano's (☎ 532796; 9 Mill Sq; pizzas £4-8, pasta £6-10; ⏰ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This bright, buzzy Italian joint turns out excellent pizza and pasta, served either in the snug, sunlit dining room or the tiny front terrace.

Rick Stein's Café (☎ 532700; Middle St; mains £8.50-15; ⏰ closed Sun) Head for this relaxed bistro along the backstreet behind the harbour for a straightforward, daily-changing menu of seafood specials and a laid-back continental vibe.

Pescadou (☎ 532359; South Quay; mains £14-18; ⏰ lunch & dinner) Mr Stein isn't the only one around town who can turn out top-notch seafood, as this pleasant restaurant next to the Old Custom House pub proves. Our tip? Try the rosemary-roasted turbot.

Seafood Restaurant (☎ 532700; www.rickstein.com; Riverside; mains £17.50-45; ⏰ lunch & dinner) The restaurant that started the Stein empire, and still one of the county's most celebrated eateries. As you'd expect, the fish and seafood is of the highest calibre, but you'll need to plan your visit with military precision to bag a table.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 555 goes to Bodmin Parkway (50 minutes, hourly, six on Sunday) via Wadebridge. Bus 595 travels to Truro (1¾ hours, once or twice daily), while bus 556 serves Newquay (1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, five Sunday).

Tintagel

☎ 01840 / pop 1822

The spectre of King Arthur looms large over the village of Tintagel and its spectacular clifftop **castle** (EH; ☎ 770328; admission £4.30; ⏰ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar). Though the present-day ruins mostly date from the 13th century, archaeological digs have revealed the foundations of a much earlier fortress, fuelling speculation that the legendary king may indeed have been born at the castle as local legend claims. Part of the crumbling stronghold stands on a rock tower cut off from the mainland, accessed via a bridge and steep steps, and it's still possible to make out several sturdy walls and much of the castle's interior layout.

The village is awash with touristy shops and tearooms making the most of the King Arthur connection, but there's not much to keep you entertained for long. The **Old Post Office** (NT; ☎ 770024; Fore St; admission £2.60; ⏰ 11am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 11am-5.30pm Sun-Fri Mar-Jul & Sep, 11am-4pm Sun-Fri Oct) is a beautiful example of a traditional Cornish longhouse and mostly dates from the 1500s; it was used as the village's post office during the 19th century.

The **tourist office** (☎ 779084; tintagelvc@btconnect.com; Bossiney Rd; ⏰ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Nov-Feb) has a few exhibits exploring local history and the Arthur legend.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 594 runs from Truro via Wadebridge (1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Friday); the more

TOP FIVE BEACHES

- For safe swimming: Perran Sands, Perranporth (p331)
- For scenic views: Bedruthan Steps, near Padstow (p332)
- For peaceful strolling: Gwithian and Godrevy Towans, near St Ives (p328)
- For family fun: Holywell Bay, near Newquay (p332)
- For learning to surf: Fistral or Crantock, both near Newquay (p332)

frequent bus 524 runs from Wadebridge only. Both buses go on to Boscastle (10 minutes).

Boscastle

☎ 01840

A few years ago Boscastle was just another pretty village on the north Cornish coast, renowned for its beautiful harbour and picturesque valley setting. But on 16 August 2004 the village hit the headlines thanks to a devastating flash flood, the worst in Britain since the deluge at Lynmouth in 1952. Some 440 million gallons of water tore through the heart of the village in just a few hours, carrying away cars, trees and the Boscastle visitor centre, and causing devastating damage to many of village's oldest buildings. Fifty-eight properties were flooded, over a hundred cars were swept out to sea and most of the village was evacuated by helicopter – but miraculously not a single person lost their lives.

Residents have spent the last few years piecing Boscastle back together, and though many properties have been completely refurbished, rebuilding work is still going on by the harbour. At the time of writing the **visitor centre** (☎ 250010; visitorcentre@boscastle.demon.co.uk; 🕑 10am-5pm Mar-Oct) was housed in a Portakabin opposite the Cobweb Inn, although plans were afoot to move it into a building near the harbour sometime in 2006.

The much-loved **Museum of Witchcraft** (☎ 250111; The Harbour; admission £2.50; 🕑 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-6pm Sun) has been thoroughly renovated since the flood, and its eclectic collection of witch-related memorabilia (the world's largest, apparently) is back on display. Artefacts include some spooky wooden poppets (a kind of voodoo doll), lots of witchy implements, and a hideous cast-iron 'witch's bridle' designed to extract confessions from suspected hags.

SLEEPING & EATING

Riverside Hotel (☎ 250216; www.hotelriverside.co.uk; s/d £30/60; ☒) A lovely B&B housed in one of the village's oldest buildings, with pleasant pastel-coloured rooms and a new restaurant serving open sandwiches and cream teas on a delightful riverside terrace.

Old Rectory (☎ 250225; www.stjuliot.com; St Juliot; d from £52; Ⓟ ☒; 🕑 Mar-Nov) Formerly the home of the vicar of St Juliot, this opulent B&B is famous as the house where Thomas Hardy fell in love with his future wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford (the rector's sister-in-law). Period antiques, Victorian knick-knacks and heavy drapes recreate the Hardy-era atmosphere; bookworms can stroll through the woods to St Juliot Church, which features in the pages of Hardy's novel *A Pair Of Blue Eyes*.

Wellington Hotel (☎ 250202; www.boscastle-wellington.com; The Harbour; d £76-140; Ⓟ ☒) The grand old Welly Hotel, complete with its own crenellated turret, is the poshest place to stay in the village, with 15 old-fashioned country rooms dotted with antique clocks, polished dressers and thick floral carpets. The ground-floor bar is one of the village's main meeting spots and makes a great place for Sunday lunch.

Other recommendations:

Old Coach House (☎ 250398; www.old-coach.co.uk; Tintagel Rd; d £40-48; Ⓟ ☒) Chintzy rooms inside a 200-year-old coaching house above the village.

Bottreaux Hotel (☎ 250231; www.boscastlecornwall.co.uk; d £65-100; Ⓟ ☒) Fine, understated rooms inside an end-of-terrace town house, including one with a regal four-poster bed.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For buses see p335.

Bude

☎ 01288 / pop 9242

The last town of any note on the north Cornish coast, Bude is a busy seaside resort and another popular surfing hang-out, thanks to several great beaches all within easy reach. **Summerleaze** beach is closest to town and a favourite with picnicking families; the surfer's choice is **Crooklets**, just to the north. **Widemouth Bay** and **Sandymouth** are also worth a look, while the cove at **Duckpool** is often quieter than its neighbours.

Bude Visitor Centre (☎ 354240; www.visitbude.info; The Crescent; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-4pm Sun summer) is south of the town centre.

The pick of the B&Bs in Bude is **Camelot Hotel** (☎ 0800 781 2536; www.camelot-hotel.co.uk; Downs View; s/d £49/98; Ⓟ ☒ 🖳), with plenty of plain and comfortable rooms dotted around the rambling house and views across the fairways of the nearby golf course.

The beachside café **Life's a Beach** (☎ 355222; Summerleaze Beach; mains £11-16; 🕑 Mon-Sat) transforms from a lunchtime bistro to a snazzy candlelit restaurant by night, specialising in seafood and fantastic fish dishes.

Bus 594 travels from Truro (three hours, four daily Monday to Saturday) via Wadebridge, Boscastle and Tintagel.

Bodmin Moor

Cornwall's 'roof' is a high heath pockmarked with bogs and granite hills, including Rough Tor (pronounced *row-tor*, 400m) and Brown Willy (419m), Cornwall's highest point. It's a desolate place that works on the imagination; the Beast of Bodmin, a large black cat-like creature, has been seen regularly for many years, although no-one's ever managed to snap a decent picture.

Bodmin tourist office (☎ 01208-76616; www.bodminlive.com; Mount Folly; 🕑 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) can help with information on exploring the moor. The small **Town Museum** (☎ 01208-77067; Mount Folly; admission free; 🕑 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep) is opposite.

The A30 cuts across the centre of the moor from **Launceston**, which has a ruined 11th-century **castle** (EH; ☎ 01566-772365; admission £2; 🕑 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct), and an interesting granite **church**.

Jamaica Inn (☎ 01566-86250; www.jamaicainn.co.uk; s £65, d £70-100; Ⓟ ☒), out on the desolate moor near Bolventor, was made famous by Daphne du Maurier's novel. On a misty winter's night the place still feels hugely atmospheric; the inn also contains a small smuggling museum and a room devoted to du Maurier.

About a mile south is **Dozmary Pool**, said to have been where Arthur's sword, Excalibur, was thrown after his death. It's a 4-mile walk northwest of Jamaica Inn to Brown Willy.

The **Bodmin & Wenford Railway** (☎ 0845 125 9678; www.bodminandwenfordrailway.co.uk; return ticket £7.50) is the last standard-gauge railway in Cornwall plied by steam locomotives. The old-fashioned steam trains are still decked out with their original 1950s livery, and chug from Bodmin Parkway and Bodmin General station to Boscarne Junction, where you can join up with the Camel Trail cycle route (p334). There are two to four return trips daily depending on season.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bodmin has bus connections with St Austell (bus 529, one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday), as well as Bodmin Parkway (bus 555, 15 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), on the London to Penzance train line.

ISLES OF SCILLY

☎ 01720

It's not quite true to say that Land's End is the most westerly point of the British Isles; that claim truly belongs to the tiny Isles of Scilly, 28 miles southwest of mainland Cornwall. Over 140 islands make up this miniature archipelago, but only five are inhabited: St Mary's is the largest and busiest island, closely followed by Tresco, while only a few hardy souls remain on Bryher, St Martin's and St Agnes. Nurtured by the Gulf Stream and blessed with a balmy subtropical climate, the Scillys have long survived on the traditional industries of farming, fishing and flower-growing, but these days tourism is by far the biggest money-spinner. With a laid-back island lifestyle, a strong community spirit and some of the most glorious beaches anywhere in England, it's hardly surprising that many visitors find themselves drawn back to the Scillys year after year. While life moves on at breakneck speed in the outside world, time in the Scillys just seems happy to stand still.

Information

The **Isles of Scilly Tourist Board** (☎ 422536; tic@scilly.gov.uk; Hugh Town, St Mary's; 🕑 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun May-Sep, shorter hours in winter) is on St Mary's.

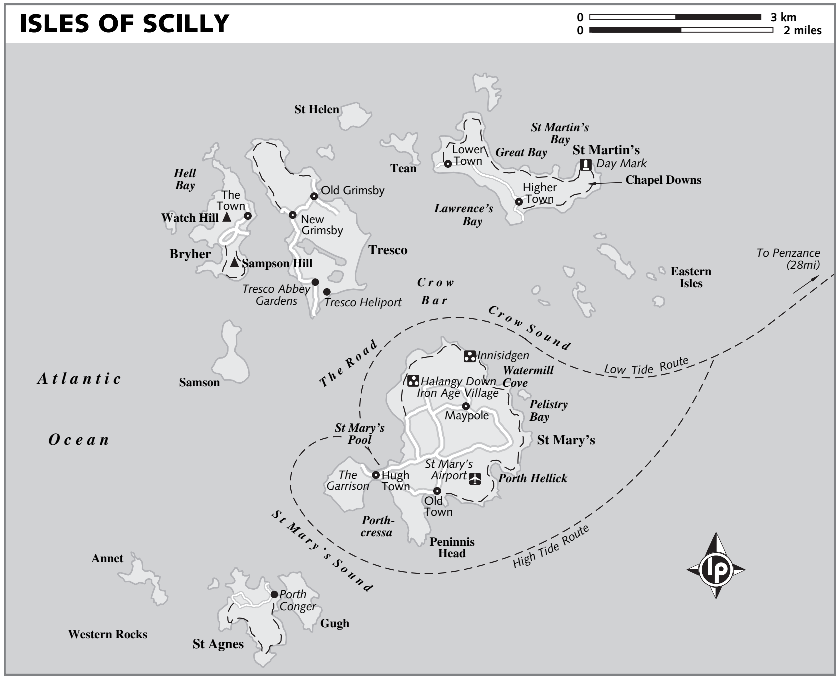
There are several good resources available online, including the locally run website www.scillyonline.co.uk and the tourist information centre's website (www.simplyscilly.co.uk), which has full accommodation listings.

The islands get very busy in summer, and many businesses shut down completely in winter, so make sure you plan ahead accordingly. All the islands, except Tresco, have a simple camp site, but many visitors choose to stay in self-catering accommodation – try **Island Properties** (☎ 422082; St Mary's) or **Sibley's Island Homes** (☎ 422431; sibleys@scilly.fsnet.co.uk).

St Mary's

The largest and busiest island in the Scillys is St Mary's, and by local standards it's a bustling metropolis, with most of the islands' big hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and shops, and the vast majority of the summertime visitors. The Scillonian ferry and all flights from the mainland arrive on St Mary's, but the other main islands are easily reached via the inter-island launches that leave from the harbour every morning.

About a mile south of the airport is the main settlement of **Hugh Town**, where you'll find most of the island's hotels and guesthouses, and the **Isles of Scilly Museum** (☎ 422337; Church St; adult/child £2/50p; 🕑 10am-4.30pm in summer, 10am-noon



Mon-Sat in winter, or by arrangement), which has some fantastically atmospheric exhibits, including lots of archive photos of the islands, various artefacts recovered from shipwrecks (including muskets, a cannon and a ship's bell) and a fully rigged pilot gig dating from 1877.

The island even has its own **perfumery** (☎ 423304; Porthloo; 🕘 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), which sells handmade soaps, potpourri and perfumes flavoured with the scents of Scilly flowers.

A little way south of Hugh Town is **Old Town**, once the island's main harbour but now home to a few small cafés, a village pub and a pleasant beach. Look out for the minuscule Old Town Church, where the services are still conducted by candlelight; the graveyard contains a memorial to Augustus Smith, founder of the Abbey Garden, as well as the grave of former prime minister Harold Wilson.

There are lots of small inlets scattered around the island's coastline, best reached on foot or by bike: Porth Hellick, Watermill Cove and the relatively remote Pelistry Bay are worth seeking out. St Mary's also has some unique ancient sites, notably the Iron Age village at Halangy Down, a mile north of Hugh Town, and the barrows at Bant's Carn and Innisidgen.

Scilly Walks (☎ 423326; www.scillywalks.co.uk) leads three-hour archaeological and historical tours, costing £5/2.50 per adult/child, as well as visits to other offshore islands. Twitchers should get in touch with **Will Wagstaff** (☎ 422212), who runs regular bird-watching tours.

For diving on St Mary's, contact **Island Sea Safaris** (☎ 422732), which also offers white-knuckle speedboat rides (£18 to £25) around the islands and snorkelling trips to the local seal colonies (£36).

The traditional sport of pilot-gig racing is still popular in the Scillys. These six-oared wooden boats were originally used to race out to rescue foundering ships, but these days gig racing is a highly competitive sport. Races are held most weekends, and every May St Mary's hosts the World Pilot Gig Championships, which attracts teams from as far away as Holland and the USA.

SLEEPING

Campsite (☎ 422670; tedmoulson@aol.com; Tower Cottage, Garrison; tent sites per person £6-8) This popular, well-run camp site is tucked away in the dunes just behind Middle Town beach. The facilities are a little basic, but still a cut above most other camp sites on the Scillys. There's a laundry and a toilet block equipped with coin-operated showers, kitchen sinks and hot and cold water, and the beach is just steps away.

Evergreen Cottage (☎ 422711; www.evergreencottageguesthouse.co.uk; The Parade; d £58-69) This tiny little whitewashed cob cottage has unsurprisingly mini-sized rooms, but its sturdy walls means it stays cool even in the height of summer.

Wheelhouse (☎ 422719; Porthcressa Beach; d £60-90) This lovely modern B&B has perhaps the best position of any on St Mary's, right above Porthcressa Beach, with a small outside terrace where you can soak up the sunshine while tucking into a hearty home-cooked breakfast.

Crebinick Guest House (☎ 422968; www.crebinick.co.uk; Church St; d £66-80; 🚭) Small, sweet rooms in a solid 18th-century terraced house, carefully renovated and efficiently run by its local owners.

Star Castle Hotel (☎ 422317; www.star-castle.co.uk; The Garrison; depending on season r £110-146, ste £166-296; 🚭 🏊) This strangely shaped hotel was originally part of a 16th-century fort, which explains its peculiar layout in the form of an eight-pointed star. These days it's a supremely comfortable island hotel, boasting lovely maritime-themed rooms and a brace of restaurants where the seafood is out of this world.

St Mary's Hall Hotel (☎ 422316; www.stmaryshallhotel.co.uk; r £160-240; 🚭) This beautifully renovated mansion was built for the Italian nobleman Leon de Ferrari in 1938, and it's still an upper-class place to stay, with a choice of flowery Count Leon rooms or lavish designer suites, complete with LCD TVs and Chinese rugs.

Tresco

Once owned by Tavistock Abbey, Tresco is the second-largest island, and the second most visited after St Mary's. The main attraction is the **Abbey Garden** (☎ 424105; www.tresco.co.uk/the_abbey_garden; admission £8.50; 🕘 9.30am-4pm), first laid out in 1834 on the site of a 10th-century Benedictine abbey. The terraced gardens feature more than 5000 subtropical plants, including species from Brazil, New Zealand and South Africa, and the intriguing Valhalla collection, made up of figureheads and nameplates salvaged from the many ships that have foundered off Tresco's shores.

There are only two places to stay on the island, apart from self-catering cottages.

New Inn (☎ 422844; newinn@tresco.co.uk; d depending on season £77-110; mains £5-18; 🚭) has been whetting Scillonian whistles for several centuries, and is still the hub of island life. The upstairs rooms are smartly finished with subtle colours and all the mod cons, and a few boast views over the channel to Bryher.

For something altogether more upmarket, the eye-poppingly expensive **Island Hotel** (☎ 422883; islandhotel@tresco.co.uk; r £150-440; ❄ 🚭 🏊) has bedrooms spread across several wings, with a choice of either private garden patios or glorious sea-view balconies. The décor throughout is elegance personified, ranging from gingham-checked bedrooms to luxurious suites decked out in gold and navy blue.

Bryher & Samson

Home to approximately 70 people, Bryher is the smallest and wildest inhabited island in the Scillys. Much of the landscape is covered by rough bracken and heather, and the coast often takes the full force of the Atlantic weather; Hell Bay in a winter gale is a powerful sight. There are good views over the islands from the top of Watch Hill, and Rushy Bay is one of the finest beaches in the Scillys. From the quay, occasional boats visit local seal and bird colonies and deserted Samson Island, where abandoned settlers' cottages tell a story of hard subsistence living.

The **camp site** (☎ 422886; sites £7.50) is near the quay.

Hell Bay Hotel (☎ 422947; hellbay@aol.com; d £135-420; 🚭 🏊) is a beautiful hotel that consists entirely of upmarket, impeccably finished suites, most of which boast sleek, contemporary décor, en suites, sitting rooms and private balconies.

St Martin's

The most northerly of the main islands, St Martin's is renowned for its beautiful beaches. The largest settlement is **Higher Town**, where you'll find a small village shop and **Scilly Diving** (☎ 422848; www.scillydiving.com; Higher Town; dives from £36.50). A short way to the west is **Lower Town**, home to a cluster of tightly huddled cottages and the island's only hotel.

There are several small art galleries scattered across the island, as well as a tiny vineyard and a flower farm.

On the island's southern shore is Lawrence's Bay, which reveals a broad sweep of sandy flats at low tide. Along the northern side is Great Bay, arguably the finest beach in the Scillys; from the western end, you can cross to White Island at low tide. If you walk east along the windswept northern cliffs you'll find the Day Mark, a red-and-white candy-striped landmark that was built back in 1687, and the secluded cove of Perpitch.

The **camp site** (☎ 422888; chris@stmartinscampsite.freeserve.co.uk; Middle Town; tent sites £6-8) is near Lawrence's Bay at the western end of the island.

Polreath (☎ 422046; Higher Town; s £35-50, d £70-100; 🚭) is a traditional cottage and one of the few B&Bs on the island. Rooms are snug and cosy, and it's handy for the island bakery and post office.

St Martin's on the Isle (☎ 422090; www.stmartinshotel.co.uk; d £230-550; 🚭 🏊) is the only hotel on St Martin's, and arguably one of the best in the Scillys, with landscaped grounds, an indoor swimming pool and a private quay. The 30 bedrooms have a choice of sea or garden views, and there are several upmarket suites with private sitting rooms. The in-house restaurant is renowned throughout the islands.

St Agnes

England's most southerly community somehow transcends even the tranquillity of the other islands in the Isles of Scilly; it's an ideal spot to stroll, unwind and reflect, with lots of cloistered coves, coastal walks and even a scattering of prehistoric sites. Visitors disembark at **Porth Conger**, near the decommissioned **Old Lighthouse**, which is indeed one of the oldest lighthouses in the country. Other points of interest include the tiny **Troy Town Maze**, and the historic inlets of Periglis Cove and St Warna's Cove (dedicated to the patron saint of shipwrecks). At low tide you can cross over to the island of **Gugh**, where you'll find some intriguing Bronze Age remains as well as standing stones.

The **camp site** (☎ 422360; Troy Town Farm; tent sites £5.75-8) is at the southwestern corner of the island.

The little stone-walled **Covean Cottage** (☎ 422620; d £56-68) is the perfect location for getting away from the crowds; it offers four pleasant, good-value rooms and serves excellent cream teas, light meals and sticky treats during the day.

The most southwesterly pub in all of Britain, the **Turk's Head** (☎ 422434; mains £6-10) is a real treat, with fine views, excellent beers, good pub grub and a hearty island atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

There's no transport to or from the islands on a Sunday.

AIR

The **Isles of Scilly Skybus** (☎ 0845 710 5555; www.ios-travel.co.uk) flies between St Mary's and Land's End (£119, 15 minutes) and Newquay (£138, 30 minutes) several times daily year-round. Cheaper saver fares are available for flights leaving Land's End after 2pm, or leaving St Mary's before noon. There's also at least one daily flight to Exeter (£221, 50 minutes) and Bristol (£266, 70 minutes). All prices are return fares.

British International (☎ 01736-363871; www.islesofscillyhelicopter.com) helicopters fly to St Mary's (20 minutes, nine to 11 daily Monday to Friday, 15 to 17 Saturday April to September; seven daily Monday to Friday, 13 Saturday in October; three to four daily Monday to Saturday November to March) and Tresco (20 minutes, four to six daily Monday to Saturday April to October; two daily November to March) from Penzance heliport (parking costs £6 per day). Adult return fares are £142 including taxes and fuel surcharges; a cheap day-return costs £98.

BOAT

The *Scillonian* ferry (☎ 0845 710 5555; www.ios-travel.co.uk) sails between Penzance and St Mary's (£89 return, two hours 40 minutes, daily Monday to Saturday). The crossing can be notoriously rough – landlubbers might be better off taking the chopper.

Getting Around

Regular inter-island launches sail from St Mary's harbour daily in summer to the other main islands. The boats usually leave in the early morning and return in late afternoon, although there are several daily boats over to Tresco. A return trip to most offshore islands costs £6.80, although there are lots of operators and off-island trips available – ask around at the harbour to see what's on offer.

If you're travelling between the islands, make sure you pack your luggage well and label it clearly with your name and the island you're going to, as the inter-island boat trips can be a little rough and ready. Luggage rarely gets totally lost, but in the busy summer season bags sometimes end up on the wrong island and might not turn up till the next trip.

The airport bus service (single/return £2.50/4.50) departs from the strand in Hugh Town roughly 40 minutes before each flight. A circular bus service runs around St Mary's several times daily in summer (£1 to all destinations).

There's a twice-daily trip around St Mary's on a vintage open-top bus known as the Island Rover (www.islandrover.co.uk, £6), leaving at 10.15am and 1.30pm from the park. Ferry passengers can buy bus tickets on board the boat.

Bikes are available from **Buccaboo Hire** (☎ 422289; Porthcressa, Hugh Town) from around £6 per day.

For taxis, try **Island Taxis** (☎ 422126) or **Scilly Cabs** (☎ 422901).

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Yorkshire

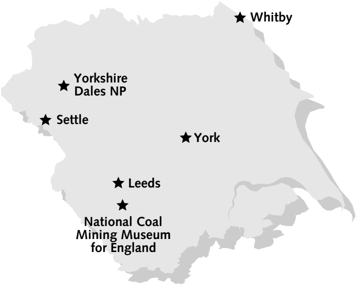
Tough, brazen and renowned for a dogged derring-do that makes it the most 'English' of regions, Yorkshire nevertheless eschews such a label and stubbornly holds on to its own sense of self, an irony that is hardly lost on the inhabitants of God's Own Country, as Yorkshire folk half-jokingly refer to where they're from – a place so huge it's divided into four separate counties – South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

It's all to do with history, you see, and Yorkshire's is pretty special: the term 'East Riding' is a geographical clue from the ancient days of the Danelaw, the 9th-century Viking-governed region that roughly covered the same territory when the notion of 'England' as we know it didn't even exist. Indeed, the counties wear their history with enormous pride, and you can explore virtually every facet of the English experience past and present from the Middle Ages to today, in abbeys, castles, historic houses, medieval cities, industrial centres and urban playgrounds.

The landscapes are pretty extraordinary too: from the dark moors and brooding hills that roll their way to the dramatic cliffs of the coast, Yorkshire has been walked on, climbed over, cycled through and written about for centuries.

But ultimately Yorkshire is heaven-blessed on account of the people. Proud, industrious and hard-working, it is their never-sit-on-the-fence opinions about life, love, beer and all of the other incidental things in life – coupled with a warmth that is easily visible beneath the initial gruffness of the first meeting – that makes Yorkshire so bloody wonderful.

HIGHLIGHTS



- Winding your way through the narrow streets and exploring York's awe-inspiring **cathedral** (p529) and fabulous **museums** (p532)
- Finding your inner Heathcliff and Cathy amid the green valleys and high moors of the **Yorkshire Dales National Park** (p517)
- Lolling in **Leeds** (p508): shopping, eating, drinking, dancing…and more shopping
- Exploring the depths of **Whitby** (p549), a favourite with sea dogs, sun-lovers and lackeys of the Prince of Darkness
- Riding the length of the **Settle–Carlisle Line** (p521) and getting some scenery by steam engine
- Going underground at the dark side of mining at the **National Coal Mining Museum for England** (p514) near Wakefield

- POPULATION: 4.96 MILLION
- AREA: 5958 SQ MILES

Information

Yorkshire Tourist Board (☎ 01904-707070; www.yorkshirevisitor.com; 312 Tadcaster Rd, York YO24 1GS) has plenty of general leaflets and brochures. For more detailed information, contact the local tourist offices listed throughout this chapter.

Activities

Within Yorkshire are high peaks, wild hills, tranquil valleys, farmland, moorland and a stupendous coastline. With this fantastic selection, not surprisingly, it's a great place for outdoor activities.

CYCLING

Cycling is a great way to see Yorkshire; there's a vast network of country lanes, although the most scenic areas are also attractive to car drivers, so even some minor roads can be busy at weekends. Options include the following:

North York Moors Off-road bikers can avail themselves of the networks of bridle paths, former railways and disused mining tracks now turned over to two-wheel use.

Whitby to Scarborough A traffic-free route that includes a disused railway line, and an effortless way to tour this rugged coastline.

White Rose Cycle Route A 120-mile cruise from Hull to York to Middlesbrough, via the rolling Yorkshire Wolds and the dramatic edge of the North York Moors, and a traffic-free section on the old railway between Selby and York. It is part of the National Cycle Network (p88).

Yorkshire Dales Great cycling in the quieter areas in the north around Swaledale and Wensleydale, and the west around Dentdale. The areas just outside the park, like Nidderdale, are also good. Also an excellent network of old 'drove roads' (formerly used for driving cattle to market) which wind across lonely hillsides, and tie in neatly with the narrow country lanes in the valleys.

WALKING

For shorter walks and rambles, the best area is the **Yorkshire Dales**, with a great selection of hard and easy walks through scenic valleys or over wild hilltops, with even a few peaks thrown in for good measure. The **Yorkshire Wolds** hold hidden delights, while the quiet valleys and dramatic coasts of the **North York Moors** also have many good opportunities, although the broad ridges of the high moors can be a bit featureless and less attractive for keen walkers.

For general information get the *Walk Yorkshire* brochure from tourist offices or see www.walkyorkshire.com. All tourist offices stock a mountain of leaflets (free or up to £1.50) on local walks, and sell more detailed guidebooks and maps. At train stations and tourist offices, it's worth looking out for leaflets produced by companies such as Northern Spirit, detailing walks from train stations. Some tie in with train times, so you can walk one way and ride back.

Long-Distance Walks

Cleveland Way A venerable moor-and-coast classic (details in the North York Moors section, p545).

Coast to Coast Walk England's number one walk, 190 miles across northern England eastwards from the Lake District, crossing the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors. Doing the Yorkshire sections would take a week to 10 days and offers some of the finest walking of its kind in England.

Dales Way Charming and not-too-strenuous amble from the Yorkshire Dales to the Lake District (details in the Yorkshire Dales section, p519).

Pennine Way The Yorkshire section of England's most famous walk starts on day two and runs for more than 100 miles, via Hebden Bridge, Malham, Horton-in-Ribblesdale and Hawes, passing near Haworth and Skipton.

Wolds Way Beautiful but oft-overlooked walk that winds through the most scenic part of eastern Yorkshire (see p524).

Getting There & Around

Yorkshire covers a large part of northern England, and a vast range of landscapes. From the Pennine Hills on the western side of the region (separating Yorkshire from age-old rival Lancashire), you can travel through the green valleys of the Yorkshire Dales, across the plains of the Vale of York and the rolling hills of the North York Moors and Yorkshire Wolds, to finally end at the dramatic east coast.

The major north–south transport routes – the M1 and A1 motorways and the main London to Edinburgh railway line – run through the middle of Yorkshire following the flat lands between the Pennines and the Moors, and serving the key cities of Sheffield, Leeds and York.

Yorkshire's main gateway cities by road and rail are Sheffield in the far south, Leeds for the west and York for the centre and north. If you're coming by sea from northern Europe, Hull (in the East Riding) is the region's main port. More specific details for each area are given under Getting There & Away in the separate sections throughout this chapter. For inquiries, the national **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608) covers buses and trains all over Yorkshire.

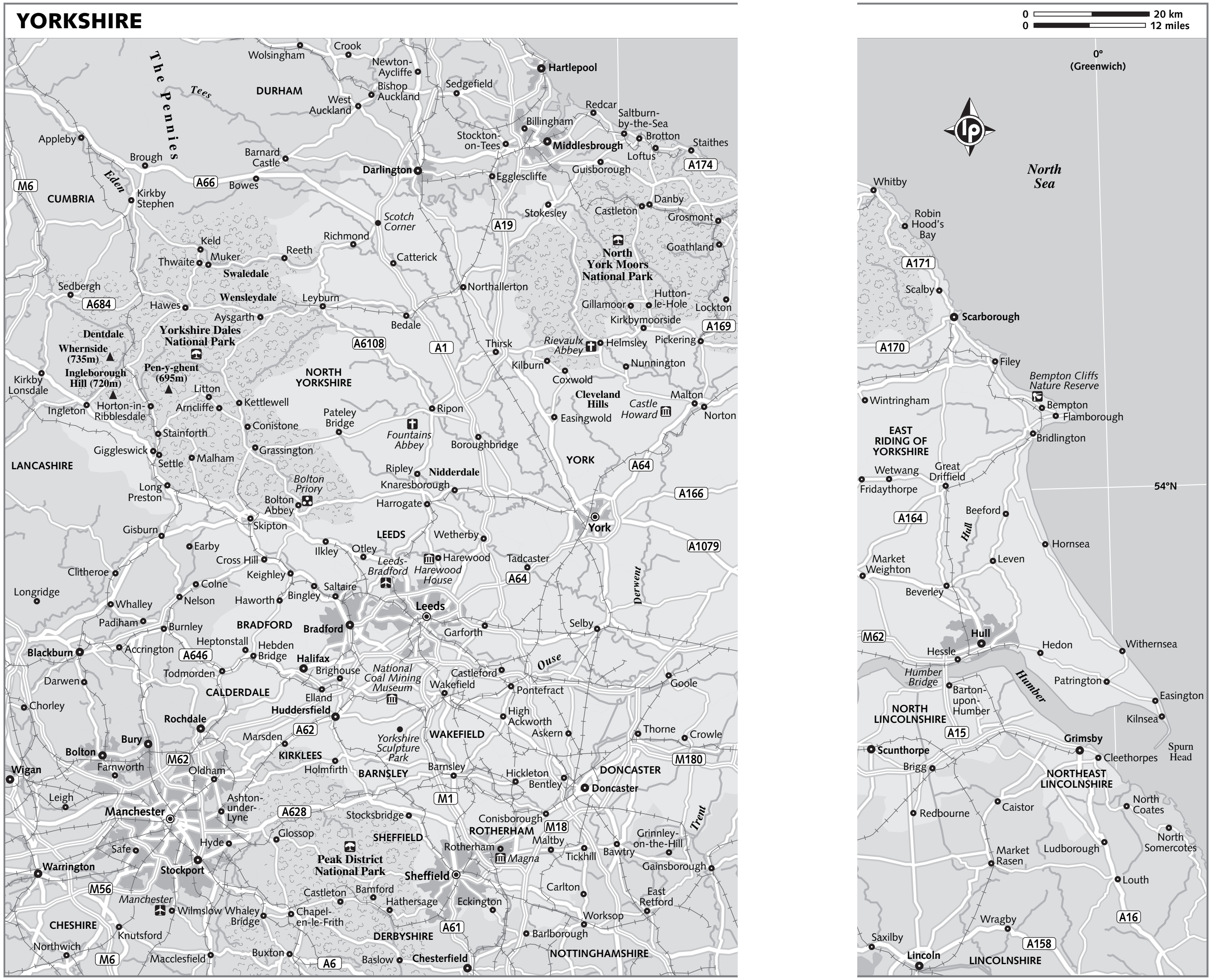
BOAT

Details on passenger ferries to Hull from northern Europe are given in the main Transport chapter (see p968).

BUS

Long-distances buses and coaches run by **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080) regularly service most cities and large towns in Yorkshire from London, the south of England, the Midlands and Scotland. More details are given under Getting There & Away in the individual town and city sections.

Bus transport around Yorkshire is frequent and efficient, especially between major towns. Services are more sporadic in the national parks but still perfectly adequate for reaching most places, particularly in the summer months (June to September).


YORKSHIRE
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0° (Greenwich)
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North Sea
The Pennines
Tees
Eden
Ouse
Derwent
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Hull
Humber
DURHAM
CUMBRIA
LANCASHIRE
NORTH YORKSHIRE
YORK
LEEDS
BRADFORD
CALDERDALE
KIRKLEES
WAKEFIELD
BARNSLEY
DONCASTER
ROTHERHAM
SHEFFIELD
DERBYSHIRE
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
CHESHIRE
EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE
NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE
NORTHEAST LINCOLNSHIRE
LINCOLNSHIRE
Wolsingham
Crook
Newton-Aycliffe
Bishop Auckland
West Auckland
Sedgefield
Hartlepool
Redcar
Saltburn-by-the-Sea
Billingham
Stockton-on-Tees
Middlesbrough
Brotton
Staithes
Loftus
Guisborough
Darlington
Egglescliffe
Appleby
Brough
Barnard Castle
Bowes
Kirkby Stephen
Scotch Corner
Stokesley
Castleton
Danby
Grosmont
Goathland
Richmond
Keld
Muker
Reeth
Thwaite
Swaledale
Catterick
North York Moors National Park
Northallerton
Sedbergh
Hawes
Wensleydale
Leyburn
Aysgarth
Bedale
Gillamoor
Hutton-le-Hole
Lockton
Kirkbymoorside
Pickering
Dentdale
Whernside (735m)
Yorkshire Dales National Park
Ingleborough Hill (720m)
Pen-y-ghent (695m)
Thirsk
Rievaulx Abbey
Helmsley
Kilburn
Nunnington
Coxwold
Kirkby Lonsdale
Ingleton
Horton-in-Ribblesdale
Litton
Arncliffe
Kettlewell
Pateley Bridge
Ripon
Cleveland Hills
Easingwold
Castle Howard
Malton
Norton
Stainforth
Conistone
Fountains Abbey
Boroughbridge
Giggleswick
Settle
Malham
Grassington
Ripley
Nidderdale
Knaresborough
Long Preston
Bolton Priory
Bolton Abbey
Harrogate
Skipton
Gisburn
Earby
Wetherby
Cross Hill
Ilkley
Otley
Harewood
Harewood House
Tadcaster
Leeds-Bradford
Clitheroe
Colne
Keighley
Saltaire
Longridge
Whalley
Nelson
Haworth
Bingley
Leeds
Padiham
Burnley
Bradford
Garforth
Selby
Blackburn
Accrington
Heptonstall
Hebden Bridge
Halifax
Brighouse
National Coal Mining Museum
Castleford
Wakefield
Pontefract
Goole
Darwen
Todmorden
Elland
Chorley
Huddersfield
High Ackworth
Askern
Thorne
Crowle
Rochdale
Marsden
Yorkshire Sculpture Park
Bury
Bolton
Holmfirth
Barnsley
Hickleton
Bentley
Doncaster
Wigan
Farnworth
Oldham
Leigh
Ashton-under-Lyne
Manchester
Stocksbridge
Conisborough
Glossop
Maltby
Rotherham
Magna
Tickhill
Bawtry
Grinnley-on-the-Hill
Safe
Hyde
Warrington
Stockport
Peak District National Park
Sheffield
Gainsborough
Castleton
Bamford
Hathersage
Eckington
Carlton
East Retford
Manchester
Wilmslow
Whaley Bridge
Chapel-en-le-Frith
Worksop
Knutsford
Northwich
Barlborough
Macclesfield
Buxton
Baslow
Chesterfield
Whitby
Robin Hood's Bay
Scalby
Scarborough
Filey
Bempton Cliffs Nature Reserve
Bempton
Flamborough
Wintringham
Bridlington
Wetwang
Great Driffield
Fridaythorpe
Beeford
Hornsea
Market Weighton
Leven
Beverley
Hull
Hessle
Hedon
Withernsea
Humber Bridge
Barton-upon-Humber
Patrington
Easington
Kilnsea
Spurn Head
Grimsby
Cleethorpes
Scunthorpe
Brigg
Redbourne
Caistor
North Coates
North Somercotes
Market Rasen
Ludborough
Louth
Wragby
Saxilby
Lincoln
M6
A66
A684
A6108
A1
A19
A174
A169
A64
A166
A1079
A646
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M62
A628
M1
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M56
A61
A6
A171
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M62
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A16
A158

TRAIN

The main line between London and Edinburgh runs through Yorkshire with at least 10 services per day, via York and Doncaster – where you might change to reach other places in Yorkshire. There are also direct services between the major towns and cities of Yorkshire and other northern cities such as Manchester and Newcastle. One of England's most famous and scenic railways is the Settle–Carlisle Line (SCL), which crosses the Yorkshire Dales via a spectacular series of tunnels and viaducts. Trains start/end in Leeds, and Carlisle is a good stop on the way to Scotland (see p521). Call or check out **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk) for timetable details.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

South Yorkshire is virtually eponymous with Sheffield and steel, especially the kind you use to cut and hold your dinner. This steel was forged, shaped and cooled in the city's mills, which were in turn fuelled by the coal mined in the outlying pits – a most productive arrangement.

Those particularly dark and satanic mills have been consigned to history's dustbin, but the hulking reminders of the irrepressible Victorian Age remain, and not just in the mills or pits, some of which have been turned into enthralling museums of the past or brilliantly converted into art galleries and exhibition spaces, but in the grand civic buildings that crown Sheffield's city centre – fitting testaments to the untrammelled ambitions of their 19th-century patrons.

And, just to prove that it's not all about the grey charms of urbanity, Sheffield's western outskirts brush up against the Peak District National Park, and the city serves as a handy gateway between the south and the north of England.

SHEFFIELD

☎ 0114 / pop 640,720

Like most of northern England's cities, Sheffield has grabbed the opportunities presented by urban renewal with both hands and has worked hard to reinvent itself as something other than the city famous for steel and snooker. The steel industry is long since gone – although the 'Sheffield Steel' stamp on locally made cutlery has quite the touch of boutique class about it – and snooker is only worth talking about for a couple of weeks a year, when Sheffield plays host to the still popular World Championships in late March and early April.

There are smart hotels and interesting galleries all over the town centre (which has been cleaned up and made rather attractive), some excellent restaurants and, inevitably, enough good bars to justify a rampant nightlife for the thousands of young people attending university here. Indeed, the real spark for the city's rebirth was lit by a younger generation, both home-grown and imported: theirs is the vision that is leading the city's transformation, and in their spare time they're indulging in Sheffield's long-standing reputation as a top spot for music. Ever heard of the Arctic Monkeys?

Orientation

You'd think they don't even want tourists. The bus and train stations are ringed by busy roads and high-rise buildings so grotty that your first thought might be to turn around and go back from whence you came. Major works are currently underway, and if all goes to plan Sheffield's welcome to the world (or at least those arriving by train) will have changed for the better by the time you read this.

The city's most interesting bits, however, are just beyond them, in a central area around Church St, Tudor Sq, Fargate and a square called Barker's Pool. Just west of here Division St and Devonshire St have hip clothes and record shops, popular restaurants and trendy bars. A block north is West St, also pretty trendy.

Information

Check your email for free at the **Central Library** (☎ 273 4711; Surrey St; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue & Thu-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Wed). The **post office** (Norfolk Row; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) is just off Fargate, and the **tourist office** (www.sheffield.gov.uk; Winter Gardens; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) – more of an info point than an actual office – is little more than a desk in the Winter Gardens.

Sights & Activities

Pride of place goes to the **Winter Gardens** (admission free; 🕒 8am-6pm), a wonderfully ambitious public space with glass roof, exotic plants and soaring wood-clad arches. The 21st-century architecture contrasts sharply with the Victorian **town hall** next door, and is further enhanced by the nearby **Peace Gardens** – complete with fountains, sculptures and lawns of lunching office workers whenever there's a bit of sun.

Sheffield's cultural revival is spearheaded by the **Millennium Galleries** (☎ 278 2600; www.sheffieldgalleries.org.uk; Arundel Gate; admission free, special exhibitions £4; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun). Displays cover Sheffield steel- and metalworking; contemporary art, craft and design; and an eclectic collection established and inspired by Victorian artist, writer, critic and philosopher John Ruskin.

Nearby, **Graves Art Gallery** (☎ 278 2600; Surrey St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a neat and accessible display of British and European modern art; the big names represented include Cézanne, Gaugin, Miró, Klee and Picasso.

The **cathedral** on Church St has wonderful stained glass (ancient and modern), a memorial to the crew of the HMS *Sheffield* lost during the Falklands conflict and the grave of the earl of Shrewsbury, famous for being the jailer of Mary Queen of Scots and the husband of Bess of Hardwick (see p444).

Sheffield's prodigious industrial heritage is the subject of the excellent **Kelham Island Museum** (☎ 272 2106; www.simt.co.uk; Alma St; adult/child £4/3; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Thu, 11am-4.45pm Sun). The most impressive display is the 12,000-horsepower steam engine (the size of a house) that is powered up twice a day. It's just north of the centre.

For a view of steel from an earlier era, go to **Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet** (☎ 236 7731; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Thu, 11am-4.45pm Sun mid-Apr–Oct). It's 4 miles southwest of the centre on the A621 (towards the Peak District) and well worth a stop. In the days before factories, metalworking was a cottage industry, just like wool or cotton. These rare (and restored) houses and machines take you right back to that era.

Sleeping

Most of the central options cater primarily to the business traveller, which makes for cheaper weekend rates; there are, alas, no budget options in the city centre.

Riverside Court Hotel (☎ 273 1962; www.riversidecourt.co.uk; 4 Nursery St; s/d/tr from £37/47/65) The riverside location and its relative proximity to the city centre make this hotel a pretty good choice if you don't want to get stung for a midweek business rate; the rooms are fairly bland but utterly inoffensive.

Accor Novotel Sheffield (☎ 278 1781; www.accorhotels.com; 50 Arundel Gate; r £58-112) The French hotel chain has brought its own modern take on the midrange business hotel to town with some success: extremely central, well-appointed and utterly contemporary, this hotel is surprisingly stylish.

Houseboat Hotels (☎ 232 6556; www.houseboathotels.com; Victoria Quays, Wharfe St; d/q from £65/86) For a little watery luxury, kick off your shoes and relax on board your very own houseboat, which comes with its own self-catering kitchen and patio area. Available for groups of two or four only; guests are also entitled to use the gym facilities across the road at the Hilton.

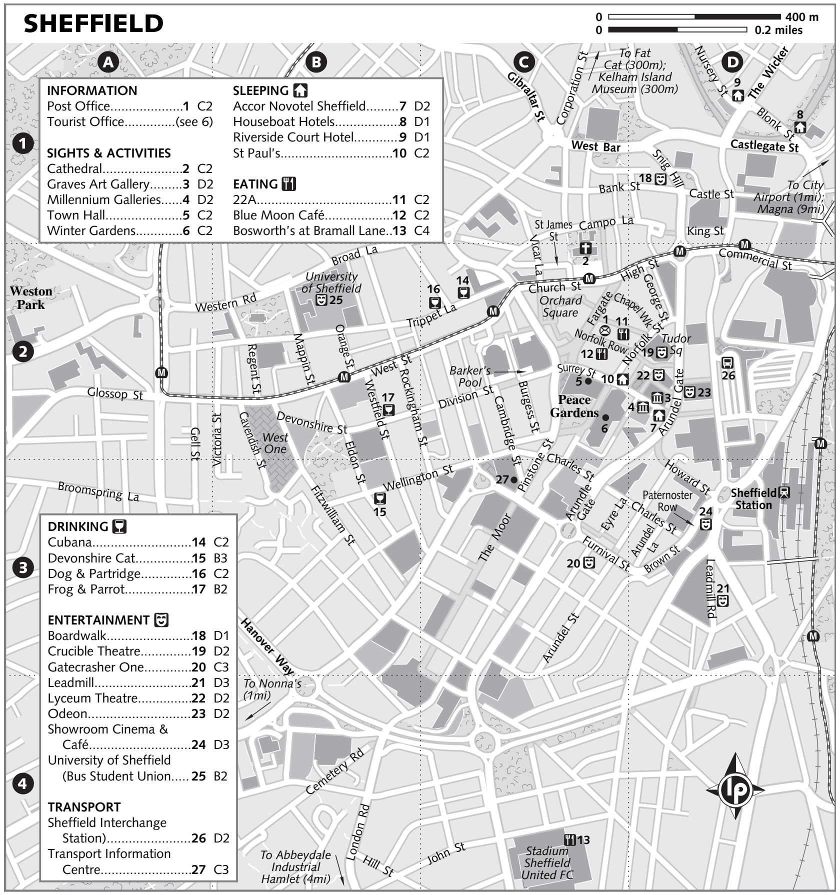
St Paul's (☎ 0870 122 6585; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk; 119 Norfolk St; r £85-145; 🅿 💻) Sheffield's top spot is this brand-new hotel with all the trimmings, a superb central location and great big windows so you can stare down onto the Winter Gardens and the cathedral.

Eating

For a wide range of city-centre options, you can't go wrong on Division St, Devonshire St, West St and Glossop Rd. There are cafés, takeaways, pubs and bars doing food, as well as a wide range of restaurants.

22A (☎ 276 7462; 22a Norfolk Row; wraps about £4; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri & Sat) Probably our favourite café in town; does a mean wrap – hummus and toasted veggie the current choice – and serves it with a decent cup of java. Perfect ingredients for a spot of people-watching. Nice music, nice people, nice place.

Blue Moon Café (☎ 276 3443; 2 St James St; mains £5-6; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Tasty veggie creations, soups and other good-for-you dishes, all served with the ubiquitous salad, in a very



SHEFFIELD

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D
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To Fat Cat (300m); Kelham Island Museum (300m)
To City Airport (1mi); Magna (9mi)
To Nonna's (1mi)
To Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet (4mi)
Weston Park
University of Sheffield
West One
Barker's Pool
Peace Gardens
Church St
Orchard Square
Tudor Sq
Sheffield Station
Stadium Sheffield United FC
Gibraltar St
Corporation St
Nursery St
The Wicker
Blonk St
West Bar
Castlegate St
Snig Hill
Bank St
Castle St
St James St
Campo La
King St
Vicar La
High St
Commercial St
Broad La
Western Rd
Trippet La
Fargate
Chapel Wk
George St
Norfolk Row
Norfolk St
Surrey St
Arundel Gate
Glossop St
Regent St
Mappin St
Orange St
West St
Rockingham St
Division St
Burgess St
Cambridge St
Westfield St
Devonshire St
Victoria St
Cavendish St
Gell St
Eldon St
Wellington St
Pinstone St
Charles St
Howard St
Paternoster Row
Broomspring La
Fitzwilliam St
The Moor
Arundel Gate
Eyre La
Furnival St
Arundel La
Brown St
Leadmill Rd
Hanover Way
Arundel St
Cemetery Rd
London Rd
Hill St
John St

INFORMATION		
Post Office	**1**	C2
Tourist Office	(see 6)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Cathedral	**2**	C2
Graves Art Gallery	**3**	D2
Millennium Galleries	**4**	D2
Town Hall	**5**	C2
Winter Gardens	**6**	C2

SLEEPING		
Accor Novotel Sheffield	**7**	D2
Houseboat Hotels	**8**	D1
Riverside Court Hotel	**9**	D1
St Paul's	**10**	C2

EATING		
22A	**11**	C2
Blue Moon Café	**12**	C2
Bosworth's at Bramall Lane	**13**	C4

DRINKING		
Cubana	**14**	C2
Devonshire Cat	**15**	B3
Dog & Partridge	**16**	C2
Frog & Parrot	**17**	B2

ENTERTAINMENT		
Boardwalk	**18**	D1
Crucible Theatre	**19**	D2
Gatecrasher One	**20**	C3
Leadmill	**21**	D3
Lyceum Theatre	**22**	D2
Odeon	**23**	D2
Showroom Cinema & Café	**24**	D3
University of Sheffield (Bus Student Union	**25**	B2

TRANSPORT		
Sheffield Interchange Station)	**26**	D2
Transport Information Centre	**27**	C3

pleasant atmosphere – perfect for a spot of Saturday afternoon lounging.

Runaway Girl (☎ 270 6160; 111 Arundel St; mains £6-10; ⌚ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Mon & Sat; wi-fi) The lunchtime crowd love this French bistro in the city for its tasty and affordable menu – as well as the free wi-fi access and lounge-around atmosphere that sees the students linger long after the suits have gone back to work.

Nonna's (☎ 268 6166; 537 Ecclesall Rd; mains £10-15; ⌚ lunch & dinner) Authentic Italian cuisine straight from nana's kitchen is the overpowering draw for the city's groove brigade, who flock to this south-of-the-centre restaurant in their droves, and so should you: the food is so good that the shortish taxi ride is well worth it.

Bosworth's at Bramall Lane (☎ 292 2777; Sheffield United Football Club, Bramall Lane; mains £10-25; ⌚ dinner Tue-Sat except match days, lunch Sun) Fine dining at a football ground? Top local chef (and lifelong Blades' fan) Jamie Bosworth thinks it's a good fit, and so far so very good: his new venture has generated rave reviews for its excellent modern British cuisine.

Drinking

Sheffield, a buzzing student town in Yorkshire, equals a really, really good night out. A pretty straightforward formula, really. Virtually every bar does pub grub until about 7pm.

Fat Cat (☎ 249 4801; 23 Alma St) One of Sheffield's finest pubs, the Fat Cat serves a wide range of real ales (some brewed on the premises) in a wonderfully unreconstructed interior. It's next door to the Kelham Island Museum.

Frog & Parrot (Division St) Home to the world's strongest beer, the 12%-strong 'Roger & Out', unsuspecting ale-heads saunter in looking to down the equivalent of a pint of fortified wine. Which is precisely why they only serve this particular brew in half-pint glasses – so that you have more than a 50/50 chance of walking out under your own steam.

Dog & Partridge (☎ 249 0888; 55 Trippett Lane) A no-nonsense Irish pub with a warren of cosy rooms, a fireplace to warm those places beer won't get to and traditional music in the evenings. It's a little bit of the Auld Sod in Sheffield.

Devonshire Cat (49 Wellington St) A beer-lover's haven, this modern bar looks a bit bland, but one look at the wide selection of top-notch beers from around England and the world will explain its enduring popularity.

Cubana (☎ 276 0475; 34 Trippet Lane) Sheffield goes Latino at this top-class bar that is about as authentic as you're ever likely to find so far from Havana. It's tiny, the *mojitos* (rum-based cocktail with lime) are great and the soundtrack is wonderful.

Entertainment

Sheffield has a good selection of nightclubs, a couple of top-notch theatres, and venues that attract big names in music – both classical and popular. The weekly *Sheffield Telegraph* (75p, every Friday) has the lowdown on Sheffield's entertainment scene, as does the freebie *Exposed,* available most everywhere.

LIVE MUSIC

Boardwalk (☎ 279 9090; www.theboardwalk live.co.uk; 39 Snig Hill) This institution is excellent for live music: local bands, old rockers, up-and-coming stars, world music, the obscure, the novel and the downright weird – they all play here. No real music fan should miss checking what's on.

Leadmill (☎ 275 4500; www.leadmill.co.uk; 6-7 Leadmill Rd) Every touring band has played the dark and dingy Leadmill on the way up (or on the way down), and it remains the best place in town to hear live rock and alternative music. There are club nights, but they're cheesy rubbish.

NIGHTCLUBS

Gatecrasher One (☎ 279 6777; www.neverstandstill.com; 112 Arundel St; admission £4-8) Sheffield's premier nightclub has abandoned its techno roots in favour of floor-friendly house, crowd pleasers and other safe bets, but it's still immensely popular. Saturdays feature a rotation of big-name DJs.

University of Sheffield Student Union (☎ 222 8500; Western Bank) A varied and generally good schedule of rock gigs and club nights – including appearances by some pretty class DJ names – make this a good spot to spend a night, not to mention the cheap lager.

THEATRE & CINEMAS

Showroom Cinema (☎ 275 7727; Paternoster Row) This is the largest independent cinema in England, with a great mix of art-house, off-beat and not-quite-mainstream films on four screens.

The Crucible and Lyceum theatres on Tudor Sq share the same **box office** (☎ 249 6000). Both are home to excellent regional drama, and the Crucible's respected resident director draws in the big names; the Crucible is also home to the annual snooker world championships.

For all other films, there's the **Odeon** (☎ 272 3981; Arundel Gate).

Getting There & Away

For all travel-related info in Sheffield and South Yorkshire, call ☎ 01709-515151.

BUS

The bus station – called the Interchange – is just east of the centre, about 100m north of the train station. National Express services link Sheffield with most major centres in the north; there are frequent buses linking Sheffield with the Peak District via Leeds (£4.50, 1¼ hours, hourly) and London (£14.50, four hours, eight daily).

TRAIN

Sheffield is served by trains from all directions: Leeds (£6.60, 30 minutes, hourly); London St Pancras (£69.50, 2½ hours, around 10 daily) via Derby or Nottingham; Manchester airport (£16.70, 70 minutes); Manchester Piccadilly (£12.20, one hour); and York (£12.70, 80 minutes).

Getting Around

Buses run every 10 minutes during the day (Monday to Saturday). Sheffield also boasts a modern Supertram that trundles through the city centre.

For a day of sightseeing, a South Yorkshire Peak Explorer pass (adult/concession £6.75/4) is valid for one day on all of the buses, trams and trains of South Yorkshire and north Derbyshire. Buy passes on your first bus, or at the helpful **transport information centre** (⌚ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) just off Pinstone St.

WEST YORKSHIRE

West Yorkshire has a reputation for being tough, unforgiving and hard-bitten – and that's just the textile industry that once drove its economy. As for the working souls who spent an unseemly eternity on the assembly line, well…their bark can be loud enough, but as is usually the way, they will rarely go so far as to bite – although say it gently, for it wouldn't do round these parts to suggest that West Yorkshire folk didn't eat nails for breakfast.

Take Leeds and Bradford. Virtual neighbours yet miles apart: Bradford is a tough old place, industrious and not overly concerned with how it looks, whereas sexy Leeds can't get enough of the mirror and works overtime to ensure that it's as pretty as it can be for the world to enjoy it.

Beyond the cities, West Yorkshire is all about a landscape of bleak moorland separated by deep valleys dotted with old mill towns and villages – the kind of landscapes so vividly described by the Brontë sisters, West Yorkshire's most renowned literary export and biggest tourist draw.

Activities

CYCLING

West Yorkshire isn't great cycling country; many roads are too urban in flavour, and the hills are darned steep too. The National Cycle Network (see p88) in West Yorkshire includes the short but traffic-free Leeds to Shipley route, which mostly follows a canalside path, passing Saltaire and on to Bradford.

WALKING

The valleys and moors of West Yorkshire make good walking country, although the South Pennines (as this area's called) is wedged between the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales, and has to defer to these areas in terms of sheer quality. The tourist offices all have leaflets and guidebooks on local walks, or see the main sections on the towns mentioned here, for more ideas. Hebden Bridge and especially Haworth make ideal bases for circular walks, with several long and short options.

The **Haworth to Hebden Bridge Path** is a popular trail that passes through quiet farmland and scenic wooded valleys.

The Pennine Way (p501), England's longest trail, follows the watershed through the area, and some good walks are possible following it for just a day or two.

Getting There & Around

The Metro is West Yorkshire's highly efficient train and bus network, centred on Leeds and Bradford – which are also the main gateways to the county. For transport details call **Metroline** (☎ 0113-245 7676; www.wymetro.com) or the national **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608). The excellent Day Rover (£3.80 for train or bus, £4.50 train and bus) tickets are good for travel on buses and trains after 9.30am on weekdays and all day at weekends. There's a thicket of additional Rovers covering buses and/or trains, plus heaps of useful Metro maps and timetables, all available at tourist offices.

LEEDS

☎ 0113 / pop 715,402

Leeds struts across England's urban stage like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever,* oozing the confidence that befits the favourite child of the New Urban Revolution, that unassailable force that has turned punch-drunk postindustrial cities into visions of the future. And the future round these parts is all about retail. For Leeds is the 'Knightsbridge of the North', the shopping mecca whose counter is just getting longer. Its heart is lined with busy pedestrianised streets, packed with shops, restaurants, upstanding Victorian edifices and stunning arcades. From cutting-edge couture to contemporary cuisine, Leeds will serve it to you on a plate…or in a stylishly designed bag. And when you're through for the day, the night awaits, full of pubs, clubs and more restaurants to keep you fed and fuelled for more.

Some critics (OK, us) feel that Leeds is a little light in terms of nonretail attractions compared with its neighbours in Manchester and York, but the city is in the midst of a huge transformation and that may all have changed by the time you read this. In the meantime, besides its own draws, Leeds is an excellent base for excursions to Haworth, Hebden Bridge and Bradford.

Orientation

Easily managed on foot (the preferred method of transport), Leeds' city centre is where most of the action is, between Boar Lane to the south and the Headrow – the main drag – to the north. Briggate, which runs north–south between the two, is the focus of most of the shopping, while the best nightlife is concentrated in the warren of small streets at the western end of Boar Lane. In the last few years there has been a substantial waterfront development along both the River Aire and the Leeds–Liverpool Canal.

Information

Central Library (☎ 247 8274; Calverley St; ⏲ 9am-8pm Mon-Wed, 9.30am-5.30pm Thu, 9am-5pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) Free internet access.

Gateway to Yorkshire Tourist Office (☎ 242 5242; www.leeds.gov.uk; The Arcade; ⏲ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) In the train station.

Leeds General Infirmary (☎ 243 2799) West of Calverley St in the city centre.

Post office (City Sq; ⏲ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Waterstone's (☎ 244 4588; 97 Albion St) Has a good selection of maps.

Sights & Activities

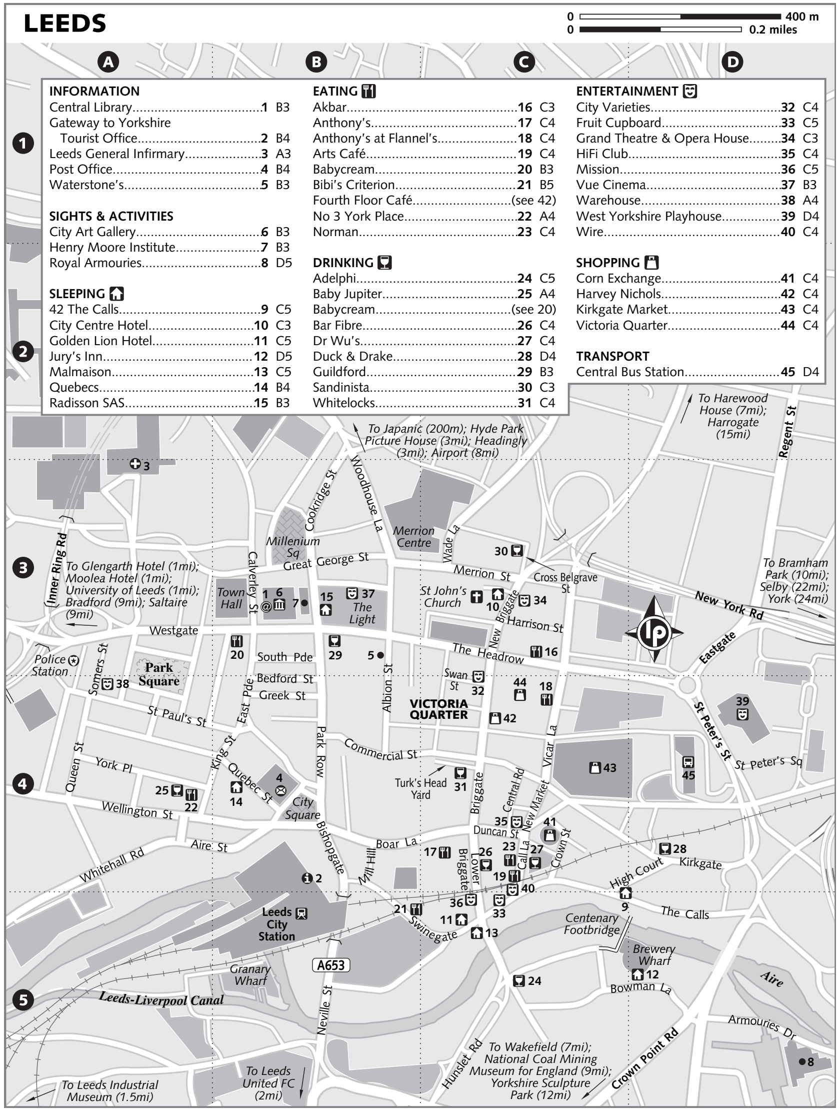
If you're starved of a bit of high culture, get yourself to the **City Art Gallery** (☎ 247 8248; www.leeds.gov.uk/artgallery; The Headrow; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 10am-8pm Wed, 1-5pm Sun) as soon as possible. It is packed with a host of 19th- and 20th-century British heavyweights – Turner, Constable, Stanley Spencer, Wyndham Lewis et al – along with more recent arrivals such as Antony Gormley, sculptor of the *Angel of the North* (p626). Pride of place, however, goes to the outstanding genius of Henry Moore (1898–1986), who graduated from the Leeds School of Art. The adjoining **Henry Moore Institute** (☎ 246 7467; www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sun, 10am-9pm Wed), in a converted Victorian warehouse, showcases the work of 20th-century sculptors from all over but not, despite the name, work by Moore.

Leeds' most interesting museum is undoubtedly the **Royal Armouries** (☎ 220 1940; www.armouries.org.uk; Armouries Dr; admission free; ⏲ 10am-5pm), originally built to house the armour and weapons from the Tower of London but subsequently expanded to cover 3000 years' worth of fighting and self-defence. It all sounds a bit macho, but the exhibits are as varied as they are fascinating: films, live-action demonstrations and hands-on technology can awaken interests you never thought you had, from jousting to Indian elephant armour. We dare you not to learn something. Catch bus 95.

One of the world's largest 'dark satanic mills' has been transformed into the **Leeds Industrial Museum** (☎ 263 7861; www.leeds.gov.uk/armleymills; adult/child £3/1; ⏲ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) so as to tell the story of Leeds' equally glorious and ignominious industrial past. The city literally became rich off the sheep's back but at some cost: working conditions were, well, Dickensian. Apart from the usual selection of working machinery, there's a particularly informative display on how cloth is actually made. Take bus 14, 66 or 67.

Festivals & Events

The August Bank Holiday (the last weekend) sees 50,000-plus music fans converge on Bramham Park, 10 miles outside the city centre, for the **Leeds Festival** (☎ 0870 060 3775; www.leedsfestival.com), one of England's biggest rock music extravaganzas, spread across four separate stages.



LEEDS
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
To Japanic (200m); Hyde Park Picture House (3mi); Headingly (3mi); Airport (8mi)
To Harewood House (7mi); Harrogate (15mi)
Regent St
To Glengarth Hotel (1mi); Moolea Hotel (1mi); University of Leeds (1mi); Bradford (9mi); Saltaire (9mi)
To Bramham Park (10mi); Selby (22mi); York (24mi)
Inner Ring Rd
Millenium Sq
Merrion Centre
Great George St
Merrion St
Cross Belgrave St
New York Rd
Town Hall
The Light
St John's Church
Harrison St
The Headrow
Westgate
Police Station
Park Square
South Pde
Bedford St
Greek St
Swan St
VICTORIA QUARTER
Eastgate
St Paul's St
Commercial St
St Peter's St
St Peter's Sq
York Pl
Queen St
Somers St
King St
Quebec St
City Square
Park Row
Albion St
Wellington St
Turk's Head Yard
Briggate
Central Rd
New Market
Vicar La
Duncan St
Aire St
Boar La
Whitehall Rd
Bishopgate
Mill Hill
Lower Briggate
Call La
Crown St
High Court
Kirkgate
The Calls
Swinegate
Leeds City Station
Centenary Footbridge
Brewery Wharf
Granary Wharf
A653
Bowman La
Aire
Leeds-Liverpool Canal
Neville St
Armouries Dr
Hunslet Rd
Crown Point Rd
To Wakefield (7mi); National Coal Mining Museum for England (9mi); Yorkshire Sculpture Park (12mi)
To Leeds United FC (2mi)
To Leeds Industrial Museum (1.5mi)
Cookridge St
Woodhouse La
Calverley St
Wade La
New Briggate
East Pde
Wellington St

INFORMATION		
Central Library	**1**	B3
Gateway to Yorkshire Tourist Office	**2**	B4
Leeds General Infirmary	**3**	A3
Post Office	**4**	B4
Waterstone's	**5**	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
City Art Gallery	**6**	B3
Henry Moore Institute	**7**	B3
Royal Armouries	**8**	D5

SLEEPING		
42 The Calls	**9**	C5
City Centre Hotel	**10**	C3
Golden Lion Hotel	**11**	C5
Jury's Inn	**12**	D5
Malmaison	**13**	C5
Quebecs	**14**	B4
Radisson SAS	**15**	B3

EATING		
Akbar	**16**	C3
Anthony's	**17**	C4
Anthony's at Flannel's	**18**	C4
Arts Café	**19**	C4
Babycream	**20**	B3
Bibi's Criterion	**21**	B5
Fourth Floor Café	(see 42)	
No 3 York Place	**22**	A4
Norman	**23**	C4

DRINKING		
Adelphi	**24**	C5
Baby Jupiter	**25**	A4
Babycream	(see 20)	
Bar Fibre	**26**	C4
Dr Wu's	**27**	C4
Duck & Drake	**28**	D4
Guildford	**29**	B3
Sandinista	**30**	C3
Whitelocks	**31**	C4

ENTERTAINMENT		
City Varieties	**32**	C4
Fruit Cupboard	**33**	C5
Grand Theatre & Opera House	**34**	C3
HiFi Club	**35**	C4
Mission	**36**	C5
Vue Cinema	**37**	B3
Warehouse	**38**	A4
West Yorkshire Playhouse	**39**	D4
Wire	**40**	C4

SHOPPING		
Corn Exchange	**41**	C4
Harvey Nichols	**42**	C4
Kirkgate Market	**43**	C4
Victoria Quarter	**44**	C4

TRANSPORT		
Central Bus Station	**45**	D4

Sleeping

There are absolutely no budget options in the city centre, and the midrange choices are between total fleapits and the odd chain hotel. If you don't want to spend money, you're forced to head for the suburbs, where there are plenty of decent B&Bs and smallish hotels.

MIDRANGE

City Centre Hotel (☎ 242 9019; www.citycentrehotelleeds.co.uk; 51a New Briggate; s/d from £45/59) A pretty ramshackle place with pea-sized bathrooms gets our vote – only just – for its central location, which makes it a good option if you're looking for somewhere to crash after a late night.

Golden Lion Hotel (☎ 243 6454; www.thegoldenlion-leeds.co.uk; 2 Lower Briggate; r £59; 🅿) Leeds' oldest hotel got a much-needed makeover and can now compete with the rest. The rooms are tidy and modern, if a little small, but the central location is second to none.

Jury's Inn (☎ 283 8800; www.jurysdoyle.com; Bowman Lane, Brewery Pl; r £59-69; 🅿 💻 ♿) The successful Irish hotel chain has another hit with its Leeds hotel: large, functional rooms, plenty of personal charm and few complaints. If you're walking, just cross the Centenary footbridge from the city centre.

There are a couple of decent hotels about a mile northwest of the city centre near the university on Woodsley Rd; it's five minutes by taxi or catch bus 63 from stand S10 at the train station. The **Glengarth Hotel** (☎ 245 7940; fax 216 8033; 162 Woodsley Rd; s/d from £25/36) is a converted family home with a dozen or so tiny rooms that are nevertheless quite comfortable; just down the street, the **Moorlea Hotel** (☎ 243 2653; www.moorleahotel.co.uk; 146 Woodsley Rd; s/d from £32/44) is a family-friendly hotel with larger, slightly more comfortable rooms.

TOP END

Radisson SAS (☎ 236 6000; www.leeds.radissonsas.com; The Light, Cookridge St; r £90-175; 🅿 💻 🏊 ♿) The newest bit of luxury to hit Leeds is the extraordinary conversion of the listed former headquarters of the Leeds Permanent Building Society. The standard rooms are anything but, and you have a choice of three styles: hi tech, Art Deco and Italian. The public areas are truly elegant and the location is superb.

Malmaison (☎ 398 1000; www.malmaison.com; Sovereign St; s/d/ste £99/140/295) Self-consciously stylish, this typical Malmaison property has a fabulous waterfront location and all of the trademark touches: huge comfy beds, sexy lighting and all the latest designer gear. The entrance is actually on Swinegate, but Sovereign St just sounds classier.

Quebecs (☎ 244 8989; www.theetoncollection.com; 9 Quebec St; s/d/ste from £150/160/235) Victorian grace at its opulent best is the theme of our favourite hotel in town, a brilliant conversion of the former Victorian Leeds & County Liberal Club. The elaborate wood panelling and stunning heraldic stained-glass windows in the public areas are matched by the contemporary but equally luxurious bedrooms. Two of the deluxe suites – the cutely named Sherbert and Liquorice suites – have dramatic spiral staircases.

42 The Calls (☎ 244 0099; www.42thecalls.co.uk; 42 The Calls; r £150-395) This snazzy boutique hotel in what was once a 19th-century grain mill is a big hit with the trendy business crowd, who love its sharp, polished lines and designer aesthetic. The smaller studio rooms are pretty compact indeed. Breakfast is not included; it'll cost you an extra £10.95. In for a penny, in for a pound? Sunday night rates start at £85.

Eating

Eating well is never a problem; the choice is getting better all the time and the quality just keeps going up.

BUDGET

Akbar (☎ 245 6566; 15 Eastgate; mains £4-6; 🕒 dinner only) The naan served at this exceptionally popular Indian restaurant are absolutely massive, and that's just one of many reasons to tuck into some of England's favourite cuisine at this particular spot.

Arts Café (☎ 243 8243; www.artscafebar.co.uk; 42 Call Lane; lunch mains about £5, dinner mains about £8; 🕒 lunch & dinner, to 2am Fri & Sat) Local art on the walls and a Bohemian vibe throughout make this a popular place for quiet reflection, a chat and a really good cup of coffee to wash down the excellent food – how about some monkfish lasagne?

Norman (☎ 234 3988; 36 Call Lane; mains £5-8; 🕒 lunch & dinner) The tasty Japanese noodle menu at one of the city's best bars is the reason to come here before nightfall; this place is as stylish by day as it is popular by night.

MIDRANGE

Bibi's Criterion (☎ 243 0905; Criterion Pl, Swinegate; mains £8-15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat & Sun) The mamma of Leeds' Italian eateries looks increasingly like Donnatella Versace dresses – lots of bling and shine – but with age comes experience and the nosh remains the best Italian in town.

Babycream (☎ 0800 027 7171; 153-155 The Headrow; mains £10-19; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Cool drips off the white walls and onto the white leather furniture, where you and your party are gathered to share, fondue-style, in a platter of delicacies from around the globe. As you eat, the background music makes you tap your feet, and before you know it you've settled in for the day and moved on to cocktails. It's the Cream experience, and it's pretty good...

Anthony's at Flannel's (☎ 242 8732; Flannel's, 68-78 Vicar Lane; afternoon tea £10.75; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) The brasserie brother of the award-winning (and much more expensive) Anthony's (below), this 3rd-floor café features much of Anthony's style stuffed into the excellent sandwiches, salads and luxurious afternoon tea.

Fourth Floor Café (☎ 204 8000; Harvey Nichols, 107-111 Briggate; mains from £11; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-10pm Thu & Sat, noon-5pm Sun) A department store with a fancy restaurant? It could only be Harvey Nicks. It's called a café, but don't be fooled: the nosh here is the best of British, even if the portions would only satisfy the models in their catalogue.

TOP END

If you want to splurge, Leeds has a handful of restaurants that are worth every last penny.

No 3 York Place (☎ 245 9922; www.no3yorkplace.co.uk; 3 York Pl; mains £13.95-23.95; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Any debate over which is the best restaurant in town will feature this superb French eatery, with its regularly changing menu of Gallic delicacies with an English bent – how about roast of lamb with Savoy cabbage, olive mash and a Niçoise sauce?

Anthony's (☎ 245 5922; www.anthonysrestaurant.co.uk; 19 Boar Lane; mains £22-27; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Probably the most talked about restaurant in town, Anthony's serves superb British cuisine to a clientele so eager that they'll think nothing of booking a month in advance. If you go at any other time except Saturday evening, you'll get away with a making your reservations a day or so earlier.

Drinking

The glammed-up hordes of party animals crawl the clusters of venues around Boar Lane and Call Lane, where bars are opening all the time. Most bars open till 2am; they turn into clubs after 11pm or midnight, with an admission charge of £2 to £4, up to £6 at weekends. The more traditional pubs keep regular hours.

PUBS

Duck & Drake (☎ 246 5806; 43 Kirkgate) High ceilings, obligatory pub characters, real ales and regular, free live music – mostly jazz.

Whitelocks (☎ 245 3950; Turk's Head Yard) Great beer and good, old-fashioned décor in a very popular traditional pub dating from 1715. In summer, the crowds spill out into the courtyard.

Other recommendations:

Adelphi (☎ 245 6377; 3-5 Hunslet Rd) Built in 1898 and hardly changed since.

Guildford (☎ 244 9204; 115 The Headrow) An attractive Art Deco classic.

BARS

Babycream (☎ 0800 027 7171; www.babycream.co.uk; 153-155 The Headrow) The Scouse gurus of groove hit Leeds with a stylish bang – hardly surprising that one of the brand names of new-millennium cool should be so popular with virtually everyone.

Dr Wu's (☎ 242 7629; 35 Call Lane) Small and chock-full of black leather seats, this grungy bar would slot comfortably into New York's East Village, and don't the punters just know it. The vibe is studied cool and the DJs play a suitable blend of eclectic (but always alternative) sounds.

Baby Jupiter (☎ 242 1202; 11 York Pl) A retro gem with lots of purple velvet, hanging fishbowls and a very funky soundtrack, this was – at the time of writing – the 'in' place with those who make it their business to define what 'in' actually is.

Sandinista (☎ 305 0372; www.sandinistaleeds.co.uk; 5/5a Cross Belgrave St) Our favourite bar in town has a Latin look but a unifying theme, attracting virtually everyone with its mixed bag of music and unpretentious atmosphere. If you're not too fussed about looking glam, this is the spot for you.

Japanic (☎ 244 9550; 19 Queen Sq) Take a traditional English pub and combine it with a modern, hi-tech karaoke bar and you get Japanic, where students flock to share a £5 bottle of sake, knock back a few ales and take to the microphone. What's not to like? It's just north of the centre.

Bar Fibre (☎ 200888; www.barfibre.com; 168 Lower Briggate) Leeds' most popular gay bar, which spills out onto the cleverly named Queen's Court, is where the beautiful congregate to congratulate themselves on being so lucky.

Entertainment

In order to make sense of the ever-evolving scene, get your hands on the monthly **Leeds Guide** (www.leedsguide.co.uk; £1.70) or **Absolute Leeds** (www.absoluteleeds.co.uk; £1.50).

NIGHTCLUBS

The tremendous Leeds club scene attracts people from miles around. In true northern tradition, people brave the cold wearing next to nothing, even in winter, which is a spectacle in itself. Clubs charge a variety of admission prices, ranging from as little as £1 on a slow weeknight to £10 or more on Saturday.

HiFi Club (☎ 242 7353; www.thehificlub.co.uk; 2 Central Rd) This intimate club is a good break from the hardcore sound of four to the floor: if it's Tamla Motown or the percussive beats of dance-floor jazz that shake your booty, this is the spot for you.

Fruit Cupboard (☎ 244 3168; www.leedsclubscene.com; 50-52 Call Lane) Hip-hop, R & B and other urban beats make up the menu at this compact club known by some as 'Fight Cupboard' – but alco-fuelled trouble is a potential feature most everywhere.

Wire (☎ 234 0980; 2-8 Call Lane) The best of the new openings, this super basement club throbs to the sound of virtually everything, from rock and roll to drum 'n' bass. If you're serious about music, queue up and get down.

Mission (☎ 0870 122 0114; www.clubmission.com; 8-13 Heaton's Ct) A massive club that redefines the term 'up-for-it'. Thursday night is gay go-go dancers at the appositely named Homo.

Also check out **Warehouse** (☎ 246 8287; 19-21 Somers St), home to the gay bootie-shaker **Speed Queen** (www.speedqueen.co.uk; ⏰ 10pm-4am Sat).

THEATRE & CINEMAS

Culture vultures will find plenty to keep them entertained in Leeds.

City Varieties (☎ 243 0808; www.cityvarieties.co.uk; Swan St) This old-fashioned music hall features anything from clairvoyants to country music.

West Yorkshire Playhouse (☎ 213 7700; www.wyplayhouse.com; Quarry Hill Mount) The Playhouse has a sturdy reputation for excellent live drama.

Hyde Park Picture House (☎ 275 2045; www.leeds.gov.uk/hydepark; Brudenell Rd) This Edwardian cinema shows a meaty range of art-house and mainstream choices. Take bus 56 or 63 from the city centre.

The **Grand Theatre & Opera House** (☎ 222 6222; www.leeds.gov.uk/grandtheatre; 46 New Briggate) hosts musicals, plays and opera, including performances by acclaimed **Opera North** (☎ 244 5326; www.operanorth.co.uk).

Otherwise, for mainstream new releases, there's the **Vue Cinema** (☎ 0871 224 0240; 22 The Light, The Headrow) on the second floor of The Light entertainment complex.

SPORT

Leeds United Football Club (☎ 226 1000; www.leedsunited.com; Elland Rd) Supporters know all about pain: relegation from the Premiership in 2004 to the relative wilderness of the Championship was bad enough, but in 2006 they lost out to Watford in a promotion play-off. Loyal fans have to wait another year, but they continue to pack the Elland Rd stadium. Take bus 51, 52 or 54 from Kirkgate Market.

Headingley has been hosting cricket matches since 1890. It is still used for test matches and is the home ground of the **Yorkshire County Cricket Club** (☎ tickets 278 7394; www.yorkshireccc.org.uk; test match from £28.50). Take bus 74 or 75 from Infirmary St.

Shopping

Kirkgate Market (☎ 214 5162; ⏰ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Wed, open-air market Thu-Tue) This market, once home of Marks, who later joined Spencer, sells fresh produce and cheap goods.

Corn Exchange (☎ 234 0363; Vicar Lane; ⏰ 9am-6pm) The circular Corn Exchange, built in 1865 to house the grain trade, has a wonderful wrought, armadillo-like lid, and is the place to come for one-off clothes, eclectic jewellery or records.

Leeds' city centre has so many shopping arcades that they all seem to blend into one giant mall. Most of them are unremarkable, but the designer-ridden **Victoria Quarter** (☎ 245 5333) is worth visiting for aesthetic reasons alone. A handful of mosaic-paved, stained-glass roofed Victorian arcades have been beautifully restored (check out the County Arcade). Here, the biggest name is undoubtedly **Harvey Nichols** (☎ 204 8000; 107-111 Briggate), which has its usual selection of upmarket clothes.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Eight miles north of the city via the A65, **Leeds-Bradford airport** (☎ 250 9696) offers domestic and charter flights, plus international flights to a few major European cities. The Airlink 757 (£1.80, 45 minutes) operates every 30 minutes between the airport and the bus station and train station. A taxi costs about £17.

BUS

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) serves most major cities, including hourly services from London (£19.20, 4¼ hours) and half-hourly services from Manchester (£7.80, one hour).

Yorkshire Coastliner (☎ 01653-692556; www.yorkshirecoastliner.co.uk; Coastliner Freedom Ticket adult per day £11) has useful services linking Leeds, York, Castle Howard, Goathland and Whitby (840, 842 and X40); and York and Scarborough (843, 845 and X45).

TRAIN

Leeds City station has hourly services from London King's Cross (£84, 2½ hours), Sheffield (£7.15, 45 minutes), Manchester (£12.70, one hour) and York (£8.80, 30 minutes).

Leeds is also the starting point for services on the famous Settle–Carlisle Line. For more details, see p521.

Getting Around

Metro buses go from the Central Bus Station and on or near City Sq. The various Day Rover passes (see p507) covering trains and/or buses are good for reaching Bradford, Haworth and Hebden Bridge.

AROUND LEEDS

A day out from Leeds opens up a fascinating range of options: stately splendour at Harewood; dust and darkness at the National Coal Mining Museum; or technology and *poppadums* at Bradford, to name but a few. Places are listed roughly in order of distance from Leeds, first to the west and north, then to the south.

Bradford

☎ 01274 / pop 293,717

Their suburbs are so close that they've virtually merged into one sprawling urban conurbation, but Bradford remains far removed from its much more glamorous neighbour, Leeds. Or so they would have you believe in Leeds. But even Bradford is getting a facial: much of the dour city centre is scheduled for a revamp which, according to town planners, will see it recast as an urban park with its very own lake in front of city hall.

Thanks to its role as a major player in the wool trade, Bradford attracted large numbers of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis throughout the 20th century, who – despite occasional racial tensions – have helped reinvigorate the city and give it new energy. A high point of the year is the colourful Mela (see right).

SIGHTS

The top sight for any visit to Bradford is the **National Museum of Photography, Film & Television** (NMPFT; ☎ 202030; www.nmpft.org.uk; admission free, special events & cinemas adult/child £5/3.30, IMAX adult/child £6.50/4.30; ⏰ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Five exhibit-packed floors in this impressive, glass-fronted building tell the story of the recorded visual image from 19th-century cameras and early animation to digital technology and the psychology of advertising. There's lots of hands-on stuff too; you can film yourself in a bedroom scene or play at being a TV newsreader. The IMAX screen shows the usual combination of in-your-face nature films and space documentaries.

The oft-overlooked **SDC Colour Museum** (☎ 390 955; www.sdc.org.uk; Providence St; adult/child £2/1.50; ⏰ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat), run by the Society of Dyers and Colourists, is a little gem, just a 10-minute walk from the centre. It tells the story of Bradford's wool-dying trade, and has a fascinating section on how our eyes perceive colour, including a display contrasting the visual sense of different species (what's blue to you isn't blue to Fido).

Bradford Industrial Museum (☎ 435900; www.bradfordmuseums.org; Moorside Rd, Eccleshill; admission free; ⏰ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), 3 miles out of the centre, gives a hint of what a Yorkshire textile spinning mill was like at the peak of the Industrial Revolution. Other exhibits include various steam engines (sometimes working), transport from the last 100 years, and a horse-drawn tram to give a quick 'step back in history' round the car park.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The excellent **Bradford Mela** (www.bradfordfestival.com) is a two-day celebration (from the Sanskrit word 'to meet') of Asian music, dance, arts, crafts and food. It's held in mid-June.

EATING

Bradford is famous for its curries, so if you're still here in the evening, don't miss trying one of the city's hundred or so restaurants. A great help is the **Bradford Curry Guide** (http://website.lineone.net/~bradfordcurryguide), which sorts the rogan josh from the rubbish nosh.

Kashmir (☎ 726513; 27 Morley St; mains £4-5; ⏰ evenings to 3am) Bradford's oldest curry house has top tucker, served with no frills or booze (it's BYO). Whatever you do, go for a table upstairs, as the soul-destroying, windowless basement has all the character of a public toilet. It's just around the corner from the NMPFT.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bradford is on the Metro train line from Leeds, with very frequent services every day.

Saltaire

A Victorian-era landmark, Saltaire was a model industrial village built in 1851 by philanthropic wool-baron and teetotaller Titus Salt. Overlooking the rows of neat honey-coloured cottages was the largest factory in the world at that time. Heating, ventilation and good lighting were high on Titus Salt's list of priorities, but there was no way on earth this sober humanitarian was going to give his workers somewhere to indulge in the demon drink, so the town had no pub.

The factory is now **Salt's Mill** (☎ 01274-531163; www.saltsmill.org.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), a splendidly bright and airy cathedral-like building where the main draw is a permanent exhibition of work by local boy David Hockney (b 1937). There are also shops of books and crafts, and a café.

Saltaire's **tourist office** (☎ 01274-774993; www.visitsaltaire.com; 2 Victoria Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm) has maps of the village and runs hour-long guided walks (adult/child £3/2) of the town throughout the year.

Saltaire is 9 miles west of Leeds centre, and 3 miles north of Bradford centre (effectively an outer suburb of Bradford). It's easily reached by Metro rail from both.

Harewood

Only 7 miles north of Leeds, tiny Harewood is all about the great park, sumptuous gardens and mighty edifice of **Harewood House** (☎ 0113-218 1010; www.harewood.org; admission £12.50, Sun & Bank Holidays £14.50; 🕒 grounds 10am-6pm, house 11am-4.30pm Feb–mid-Nov, house & grounds 10am-4pm mid-Nov–Jan). A classic example of a stately English pile, the house was built between 1759 and 1772 by the era's designer superstars: John Carr (exterior), Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (grounds), and Thomas Chippendale (furniture). Robert Adams designed the interior, and Italy was raided to create an appropriate art collection. The superb terrace was added 100 years later by yet another top name, Sir Charles Barry – he of the Houses of Parliament.

Hours of entertainment can be had in the **Bird Garden**, with many colourful species including penguins (feeding time at 2pm is a highlight), and there's also a boating lake, café and adventure playground. For more activity, there's a network of walking trails around the lake or through the parkland.

From Leeds, use bus 36 (20 minutes; at least half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday), which continues to Harrogate. Visitors coming by bus get half-price admission too (so hang on to your ticket). From the main gate, it's a 2-mile walk through the grounds to the house and gardens. At busy times there's a free shuttle service.

National Coal Mining Museum

Once a working colliery, Claphouse is now the **National Coal Mining Museum for England** (☎ 01924-848806; www.ncm.org.uk; Overton, near Wakefield; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm, last tour 3.15pm), a superb testament to the inner workings of the coal mine.

The highlight of a visit is the tour underground; complete with helmet and head-torch you ride in a 'cage' almost 150m down, then follow passages all the way to the coal seam where massive drilling machines now stand idle. Former miners now work as guides, and explain the details – sometimes with a suitably authentic and almost impenetrable mix of local dialect (known in Yorkshire as Tyke) and technical terminology.

The museum is about 10 miles south of Leeds, on the A642, which drivers can reach from the M1. By public transport, take a train from Leeds to Wakefield (15 minutes, at least hourly), and then bus 232 towards Huddersfield can drop you outside the museum (25 minutes, hourly).

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

One of England's most impressive collections of sculpture is housed within the formidable 18th-century estate of Bretton Park, 200-odd hectares of lawns, fields and trees dotted with statues and abstract work. The **sculpture park** (☎ 01924-830302; www.ysp.co.uk; Bretton, near Wakefield; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) features the work of dozens of sculptors both national and international, but the main focus is on the work of local kids Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth (1903–75); the latter was born in nearby Wakefield.

The park is 12 miles south of Leeds and 18 miles north of Sheffield, just west of the M1 motorway, making it a cinch to get to for drivers. If you're on public transport, take a train from Leeds to Wakefield (15 minutes, at least hourly), or from Sheffield to Barnsley (20 minutes, at least hourly); then bus X41 runs between Wakefield and Barnsley via Bretton Park (30 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday). Bus 231 (hourly on Sunday) from Wakefield goes to Bretton Park then continues on to the National Coal Mining Museum.

HEBDEN BRIDGE

☎ 01422 / pop 4086

Yorkshire's funkiest little town is a former mill town that refused to go gently into that good night with the dying of industry's light; it raged a bit and then turned itself into an attractive little tourist trap with a slightly off-centre reputation. Besides the honest-to-God Yorkshire folk who have lived here for years, the town is home to university academics, die-hard hippies and a substantial gay community – all of which explains the inordinate number of craft shops, organic cafés and secondhand bookstores.

Above the town is the much older village of **Heptonstall**, its narrow cobbled street lined with 500-year-old cottages and the ruins of a beautiful 13th-century church. But it is the churchyard of the newer St Thomas' Church that draws the curious visitors, for here is buried the poet Sylvia Plath (1932–63), wife of another famous rhymer, Ted Hughes (1930–98), who was born in these parts.

Plath's grave lists her full name as 'Sylvia Plath Hughes', with the 'Hughes' in bronze: this is because it had been repeatedly chiselled off by Plath lovers who believe that Hughes' adultery with Assia Wevill provoked Sylvia's suicide (Wevill later also committed suicide) and so leading church authorities to ensure that the name couldn't be removed.

The **Hebden Bridge Visitor & Canal Centre** (☎ 843 831; www.calderdale.gov.uk; Butlers Wharf, New Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4.15pm Sat & Sun rest of year) has a good stock of maps and leaflets on local walks, including saunters in **Hardcastle Crags**, two unspoilt wooded valleys run by the National Trust (NT), 1.5 miles northwest of town off the A6033. There are streams and waterfalls, and numerous walking trails, some of which link to the Pennine Way, and another that takes you all the way to Haworth.

Sleeping & Eating

Mankinholes YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5952; www.yha.org.uk; Todmorden; dm £12.50) A converted 17th-century manor house 4 miles southwest of Hebden Bridge, this hostel has limited facilities (no TV room) but it is very popular with walkers; the Pennine Way is only half a mile from here.

White Lion Hotel (☎ 842197; www.whitelionhotel.net; Bridge Gate; s/d from £46/60) The choicest accommodation in town is this large 400-year-old coaching inn smack in the middle of it; the rooms in the converted coach house are that little bit more comfortable than the ones in the main house. Downstairs is a popular pub and a pretty good restaurant with a standard pub grub menu (mains £6 to £11).

Crown Fisheries (☎ 842599; 8 Crown St; mains about £4; 🕒 10am-6.30pm) A terrific chipper that serves up a great supper (fish, chips, bread and butter and tea), and also does takeaways.

Getting There & Away

Hebden Bridge is on the Leeds–Manchester Victoria Metro train line (45 minutes, services about every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday). Get off at Todmorden for the Mankinholes YHA Hostel.

HAWORTH

☎ 01535 / pop 6078

It seems that only Shakespeare himself is held in higher esteem and affection than the beloved Brontë sisters Emily, Anne and Charlotte, at least judging from the sheer numbers who trudge up the hill from the station to pay homage to them in the handsome parsonage where a handful of literary classics were born, including *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights.*

Not surprisingly, the whole place is given over to Brontë-linked tourism, but even without the literary associations Haworth is worth a trip, even if you'll be hard pushed not to be overwhelmed by the cottage industry that has grown up around the Brontës and their wonderful creations.

STEAM ENGINES & RAILWAY CHILDREN

Haworth is on the **Keighley & Worth Valley Railway** (KWVR; ☎ 645214; www.kwvr.co.uk; adult/child single £8/4, adult/child Day Rover £12/6), which runs steam and classic diesel engines between Keighley and Oxenhope. It was here, in 1969, that the classic movie *The Railway Children* was shot; Mr Perks was stationmaster at Oakworth, where the Edwardian look has been meticulously maintained. Trains operate around hourly at weekends all year; in holiday periods they run hourly every day.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 642329; www.haworth-village.org.uk; 2-4 West Lane; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) has an excellent supply of information on the village, the surrounding area and, of course, the Brontës. Another good source of information is www.brontecountry.co.uk.

Main St is lined with cafés, tearooms, pubs and shops selling everything imaginable (and more) bearing the Brontë name. Handy stops might include: the **post office** (Rawdon Rd; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat); **Venables & Bainbridge** (Main St), selling used books, including many vintage Brontë volumes; and **Rose & Co Apothecary** (84 Main St), the beautifully restored druggist so favoured by Branwell Brontë.

Sights

Your first stop should be **Haworth Parish Church** (admission free), a lovely old place of worship, built in the late 19th century, on the site of the 'old' church that the Brontë sisters knew, which was demolished in 1879. In the surrounding churchyard, gravestones are covered in moss, or thrust to one side by growing trees, which gives the whole place a tremendous feeling of age.

Set in a pretty garden overlooking the church and graveyard, the **Brontë Parsonage Museum** (☎ 642323; www.bronte.info; admission £5; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-5pm Oct-Mar) is where the Brontë family lived from 1820. Rooms are meticulously furnished and decorated exactly as they were in the Brontë era, with many personal possessions on display. There's also a neat and informative exhibition, which includes the fascinating miniature books the Brontës wrote as children.

Activities

Haworth is surrounded by the moors of the South Pennines – immediately familiar to Brontë fans – and the tourist office has leaflets on local **walks** to endless Brontë features. A 6.5-mile favourite leads to Top Withins, a ruined farm thought to have inspired *Wuthering Heights*, even though a plaque clearly states that the farmhouse bore no resemblance to the one Emily wrote about. Other walks can be worked around the **Brontë Way**, a longer route linking Bradford and Colne via Haworth. Alternatively, the Pennine Way runs west of Haworth and can be followed south to Hebden Bridge. There's also a direct walking route between Haworth and Hebden Bridge, via the scenic valleys of Hardcastle Crags.

BAD LUCK BRONTËS

The Rev Patrick Brontë, his wife Maria and six children moved to Haworth Parsonage in 1820. On 15 September 1821 Maria died of cancer, after which her unmarried sister Elizabeth Branwell arrived from Penzance to help raise the children. Three years later, the eldest girl, Maria, was sent home from school on account of ill-health and died in May 1825, aged 11. A few weeks later, her younger sister Elizabeth arrived home sick from the same school and died, aged 10, on June 15. (Years later, Charlotte immortalised the school as the infamous Lowood in *Jane Eyre*.)

The double tragedy led the good reverend to keep his remaining family close to him, and for the next few years the children were home-schooled in a highly creative environment. The children conjured up mythical heroes and countries, and produced miniature homemade books. It was an auspicious start, at least for the three girls, Charlotte, Emily and Anne; the lone boy, Branwell, was more of a painter but he lacked his sisters' drive and discipline. After a short stint as a professional artist, he ended up spending most of his days in the Black Bull pub, drunk and stoned on laudanum obtained across the street at Rose & Co Apothecary. While the three sisters were setting the London literary world alight with the publication of three superb novels – *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* – in one extraordinary year (1847), Branwell was fading quickly, and he died of tuberculosis on 24 September 1848. The family was devastated, but things quickly got worse. Emily contracted a cold at the funeral that also developed into tuberculosis; she never left the house again and died on 19 December. Anne, who had also been sick, was next: Charlotte took her to Scarborough to seek a sea cure but she died on 28 May 1849.

The remaining family never recovered. Despite her growing fame, Charlotte struggled with depression and never quite adapted to her high position in literary society. Despite her misgivings, however, she eventually married, but she too died, in the early stages of pregnancy, on 31 March 1855. All things considered, it's hardly surprising that poor old Patrick Brontë spent the remaining years of his life going increasingly insane.

Sleeping & Eating

Virtually every second house on Main St does B&B; they're mostly indistinguishable from each other but some are just that little bit cuter. There are a couple of good restaurants in town and many of the B&Bs also have small cafés that are good for a spot of tourist lunch – mediocre servings of local dishes and nice safe bets such as sandwiches.

Aitches (☎ 642501; www.aitches.co.uk; 11 West Lane; s/d from £35/50; ☒) A very classy Victorian stone bungalow with four beautiful rooms, each with wrought-iron beds and handsome furnishings. There's a residents' restaurant on the premises; a three-course meal will cost £15.

Old Registry (☎ 646503; www.theoldregistryhaworth.co.uk; 2-4 Main St; r £57-85) This is a favourite place in town, a stylishly rustic (or rustically stylish) hotel where each of the carefully themed rooms has a four-poster bed: the Blue Heaven room is just that – at least for fans of Laura Ashley's delphinium blue. We're just that little bit dramatic, so we loved the Stage Room, complete with theatrical memorabilia.

Weaver's (☎ 643822; 15 West Lane; bar suppers £5-12, 3-course meal £20-26; 🕒 Tue-Sat) Smart and stylish, with simply the best food in town and a menu featuring local specialities. Get there early to try the tasty two-course bar 'sampler' menu (£12.95).

Other options:

Haworth YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5858; www.yha.org.uk; Longlands Dr; dm £13.95; 🕒 Feb-Nov, Fri & Sat only Nov-Jan) A big old house with plenty of facilities, including a games room, lounge, cycle store and laundry. It's on the northeastern edge of town, off Lees Lane.

aworth Old Hall (☎ 642709; Sun St; snacks £3, salads £6, mains £6-10) A highly rated inn, with decent food, wine and beer, all served in convivial surroundings. The steak-and-ale pie is a classic. If you want to linger longer, two comfortable doubles cost £50.

Haworth Tea Rooms (68 Main St; lunch mains £6-10, dinner mains £7-12) A selection of healthy options including baked spuds and veggie nachos.

Getting There & Away

From Leeds, the easiest approach to Haworth is via Keighley, which is on the Metro train network. Bus 500 runs between Keighley and Haworth (15 minutes, six daily), and also serves Todmorden and Hebden Bridge. However, the most interesting way to get to Haworth from Keighley is via the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway (see the boxed text, p515).

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK

Sitting snugly between the brooding North York Moors to the east and the dramatic Lake District to the west are the Yorkshire Dales (from the Viking word *dalr*, meaning 'valleys'), a marvellous area of high hills and moors, cut through by rugged stone walls and spotted with extravagant houses and the faded, spectral grandeur of monastic ruins.

Thankfully, nature's feast has been protected as a national park since the 1950s, assuring its status as a walker's and cyclist's wonderland. But the fabulous scenery attracts plenty of four-wheeled visitors, making the roads very crowded, especially during the summer. If you can't avoid busy summer weekends, try to come by bus or train, and even then it's well worth getting off the beaten track.

Orientation & Information

The 683-sq-mile Yorkshire Dales National Park divides into two parts: in the north, two main valleys run west to east – broad expansive Wensleydale (home of the famous cheese) and narrow secretive Swaledale. In the south, the main valleys – Ribblesdale, Malhamdale, Littondale and Wharfedale – all run north–south and are the most popular areas for tourists.

The main Dales gateways are Skipton in the south, and Richmond in the northeast. Good bases in the park itself include Settle, Grassington and Hawes. All have excellent tourist offices (some are called park visitor centres), stocking a mountain of local guidebooks and maps, and providing accommodation details.

To the northwest and west, the towns of Kirkby Stephen and Kirkby Lonsdale can also make handy jumping-off points, although both these spots are outside the national park boundary, and actually in the county of Cumbria (despite definite Dales affiliations).

The *Visitor* newspaper, available from tourist offices, lists local events and walks guided by park rangers, as well as many places to stay and eat. The official park website at www.yorkshiredales.org.uk is similarly useful.

Activities

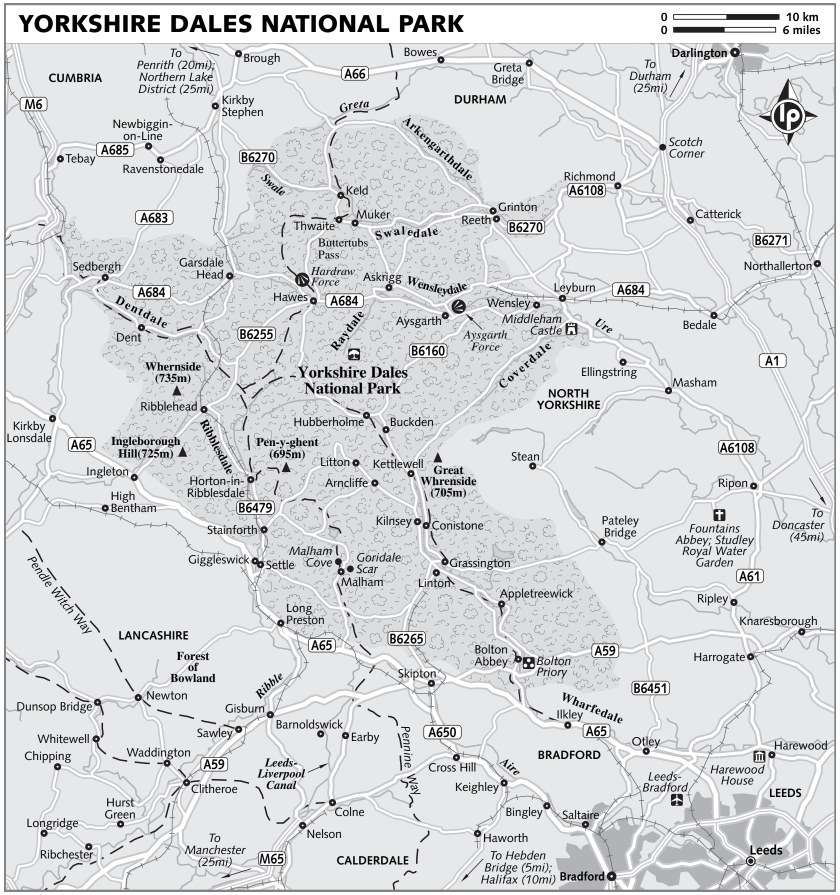
CYCLING

Other than on busy summer weekends, this is excellent cycling country. Most roads follow the rivers along the bottom of the Dales so, although there are still some steep climbs, there's also plenty on the flat. Tourist offices stock maps and leaflets with suggested routes (on-road and off-road) for a day or longer.

Just one example is the **Yorkshire Dales Cycle Way**, an energetic and exhilarating 130-mile loop, taking in the best of the park. Skipton is a convenient start, from where you ride up Wharfedale, then steeply over Fleatmoss to Hawes. From here turn east along Wensleydale to Aysgarth, then north over the wild hills to Reeth. The roads are steep but the scenery is breathtaking. Follow Swaledale westwards, through remote Keld and down to the market town of Kirkby Stephen. Then it's south to Sedbergh, and up beautiful Dentdale to pop out at Ribblehead. It's plain sailing now, through Horton-in-Ribblesdale to Stainforth, one more climb over to Malham, and finally back to Skipton for tea and medals.

WALKING

The Yorkshire Dales has a vast footpath network, with options for everything from easy strolls to challenging hikes; we suggest a few options throughout this section. Look out at tourist offices for leaflets on organised walks from train stations, notably on the Settle–Carlisle Line. Serious walkers should equip themselves with *OS Outdoor Leisure Maps Nos 2, 10* and *30*.


YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK
0 10 km
0 6 miles
CUMBRIA
To Penrith (20mi); Northern Lake District (25mi)
Brough
A66
Bowes
Greta Bridge
To Durham (25mi)
Darlington
DURHAM
M6
Kirkby Stephen
Greta
Arkengarthdale
Newbiggin-on-Line
A685
Tebay
Ravenstonedale
B6270
Scotch Corner
Richmond
A6108
Swale
Keld
Grinton
Catterick
A683
Muker
Reeth
B6270
Thwaite
Swaledale
Buttertubs Pass
B6271
Northallerton
Sedbergh
Garsdale Head
Hardraw Force
Askrigg
Wensleydale
Leyburn
A684
A684
Hawes
A684
Wensley
Dentdale
Raydale
Aysgarth
Middleham Castle
Ure
Bedale
Dent
B6255
Aysgarth Force
B6160
Coverdale
A1
Whernside (735m)
Yorkshire Dales National Park
Ellingstring
Masham
NORTH YORKSHIRE
Ribblehead
Hubberholme
Buckden
Kirkby Lonsdale
A65
Ingleborough Hill (725m)
Ribblesdale
Pen-y-ghent (695m)
A6108
Stean
Litton
Kettlewell
Great Whernside (705m)
Ingleton
Horton-in-Ribblesdale
Arncliffe
Ripon
High Bentham
B6479
Fountains Abbey; Studley Royal Water Garden
To Doncaster (45mi)
Kilnsey
Conistone
Pateley Bridge
Stainforth
Malham Cove
Goredale Scar
Giggleswick
Settle
Grassington
Malham
Linton
A61
Pendle Witch Way
Appletreewick
Ripley
Long Preston
Knaresborough
LANCASHIRE
B6265
Forest of Bowland
A65
Bolton Abbey
Bolton Priory
A59
Harrogate
Ribble
Skipton
B6451
Newton
Dunsop Bridge
Gisburn
Wharfedale
Ilkley
Barnoldswick
Whitewell
Sawley
Earby
A650
A65
Otley
Harewood
Chipping
Waddington
Pennine Way
BRADFORD
A59
Leeds-Liverpool Canal
Cross Hill
Aire
Harewood House
Clitheroe
Keighley
Leeds-Bradford
LEEDS
Hurst Green
Colne
Bingley
Saltaire
Longridge
Nelson
Haworth
To Manchester (25mi)
Ribchester
M65
CALDERDALE
To Hebden Bridge (5mi); Halifax (10mi)
Leeds
Bradford

Two of England's most famous long-distance routes cross the Dales. The Pennine Way goes through the rugged western half of the park. If you haven't got the three weeks required to cover all 259 miles, a few days in the Dales, between Malham and Hawes for example, will repay the effort. The Coast to Coast Walk (a 190-mile classic; p501) goes through lovely Swaledale in the northern Dales. Following the route for a few days is highly recommended; see p523.

Another long-distance possibility is the **Dales Way**, which begins in Ilkley, follows the River Wharfe through the heart of the Dales, and finishes at Bowness-on-Windermere in the Lake District. If you start at Grassington, it's an easy five-day 60-mile journey. A handy companion is *Dales Way Route Guide* by Arthur Gemmell and Colin Speakman (1996, £5.99), mostly strip maps at 1:25,000 in scale, available at most bookshops.

Sleeping

There are many villages in and around the park with a good range of hotels, B&Bs, hostels and camp sites. Most rural pubs also do B&B. Walkers and hardy outdoor types can take advantage of camping barns. Usually owned by farmers, booking is organised centrally through the **YHA** (☎ 0870 870 8808). For details, tourist offices have a *Camping Barns in England* leaflet.

Getting There & Around

The main gateway towns of Skipton and Richmond are well served by public transport, and local bus services radiate out from there. Get hold of the very useful *Dales Explorer* timetable from tourist offices; as well as covering every bus in the region it contains maps, B&B listings, local information and an excellent selection of walks that tie in with bus services.

Going by train, the best and most interesting access to the Dales is via the famous Settle–Carlisle Line (p521). From the south, trains start in Leeds and pass through Skipton, Settle, and numerous small villages, offering unrivalled access to the hills straight from the station platform. Of course, if you're coming from the north, Carlisle is the place to get on board.

SKIPTON

☎ 01756 / pop 14,313

This busy market town on the southern edge of the national park was once known as 'Sheeptown' – no prizes for guessing where they made their money. Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are market days on High St, bringing crowds from all over and giving the town something of a festive atmosphere. The **tourist office** (☎ 792809; www.skiptononline.co.uk; 35 Coach St; 🕐 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) is right in the middle of town.

Sights & Activities

Skipton Castle (☎ 792442; www.skiptoncastle.co.uk; High St; admission £5.40; 🕐 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Mar-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Feb), at the top of the main street, is one of the best-preserved medieval castles in England – a fascinating contrast to the ruins you'll see elsewhere – and well worth a visit.

If you fancy a cruise on the Leeds–Liverpool Canal that runs through the middle of town, **Pennine Boat Trips** (☎ 790829; www.canaltrips.co.uk; adult/child £5/2.50) has daily hour-long trips April to October; call for departure times.

Sleeping

There's a strip of B&Bs just outside the centre on Keighley Rd. All those between Nos 46 and 57 are worth trying.

Carlton House (☎ 700921; www.carltonhouse.rapidial.co.uk; 46 Keighley Rd; s/d from £25/45) A handsome house with five pretty comfortable rooms – no frills but lots of floral prints. The house is deservedly popular on account of the friendly welcome.

Eating & Drinking

Bizzie Lizzies (☎ 793189; 36 Swadford St; mains £5-6; 🕐 lunch & dinner) This modern fish-and-chip restaurant overlooking the canal has won awards for quality, a rare thing for what is essentially deep-fried goodness. There's also an attached takeaway.

Of the pubs, the **Black Horse** (Coach St) is a large place with an outside terrace and meals daily, but our favourite is the **Narrow Boat** (☎ 797922; 38 Victoria St), a traditionally styled place with a great selection of local ales and foreign beers, friendly service and bar food (not on weekends).

Getting There & Away

Skipton is the last stop on the Metro network from Leeds (40 minutes, at least hourly). For heading into the Dales, see the boxed text, p521. For Grassington, take bus 72 (£4.30, 30 minutes, six per day Monday to Saturday) or 67 (hourly, Sunday); most go via the train station.

GRASSINGTON

☎ 01756 / pop 1120

The perfect base for south Dales jaunts, Grassington's handsome Georgian centre teems with walkers and visitors throughout the summer months, soaking up an atmosphere that – despite the odd touch of faux rustication – is as attractive and traditional as you'll find in these parts. It is 6 miles north of Skipton.

The **tourist office** (☎ 752774; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, shorter hours Nov-Mar) is at the big car park on the edge of town. There's a good stock of maps and guides, and a nice little display that puts the surrounding scenery in context.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several B&Bs along and just off Main St.

Devonshire Fell (☎ 718111; www.devonshirefell.co.uk; Burnsall; s/d from £75/125) The style of this one-time gentleman's club for mill owners is distinctly contemporary, with beautiful modern furnishings crafted by local experts. It's more like a big city boutique hotel than a rustic country property.

Ashfield House (☎ 752584; www.ashfieldhouse.co.uk; Summers Fold; r from £85; ⏲ Feb-Nov) A secluded 17th-century country house behind a walled garden with exposed stone walls, open fireplaces and an all-round cosy feel. It's just off the main square.

Dales Kitchen (☎ 753208; 51 Main St; mains about £5.50; ⏲ 9am-6pm) Classic Yorkshire munchies – rarebits, local sausage and, of course, Wensleydale – in a lovely tearoom in the middle of town.

Getting There & Away

To reach Grassington, see p519. For onward travels the 72 bus continues up the valley to the nearby villages of Kettlewell and Buckden.

AROUND GRASSINGTON

North of Grassington, narrow roads lead up the beautiful valley of Wharfedale. Drivers take the road on the west side of the river; if you're cycling, take the quieter east-side option. If you're walking, follow the charming stretch of the Dales Way long-distance footpath through a classic Yorkshire Dales landscape of lush meadows surrounded by dry-stone walls, with traditional field-barns dotting the hillsides.

About 7 and 11 miles respectively from Grassington, the villages of **Kettlewell** and **Buckden** make good places to aim for; between them they offer a good choice of camp sites, B&Bs, teashops and pubs (all doing food and accommodation).

Check at Grassington tourist office about the local buses that trundle up and down Wharfedale daily in summer (weekends in winter) – ideal for bringing home weary walkers.

MALHAM

☎ 01729 / pop 120

At the northern end of the quiet and beautiful valley of Malhamdale, this small, traditional village is probably the most visited place in the valley, not only for its charm but also for the natural wonders nearby – all easily reached by foot.

The excellent **tourist office** (☎ 830363; malham@ytbtic.co.uk; ⏲ 10am-5pm daily Apr-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Mar) has the usual wealth of information, local walks leaflets, maps and guidebooks.

Walking

The 5-mile **Malham Landscape Trail** (the tourist office has details) takes in **Malham Cove**, a huge rock amphitheatre that was once a waterfall to rival Niagara, and **Gordale Scar**, a deep limestone canyon with scenic cascades and the remains of an Iron Age settlement.

The long-distance Pennine Way passes right through Malham, and you can go north or south for as many days as you like. A day's walk away is Horton-in-Ribblesdale.

Sleeping & Eating

Malham YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5946; www.yha.org.uk; dm £13.95; ⏲ mid-Feb–Nov, Fri & Sat only Dec–mid-Feb) In the village centre is this purpose-built hostel; the facilities are top-notch and young children are well catered for.

Beck Hall (☎ 830332; www.beckhallmalham.com; s/d from £23/48) This rambling 17th-century country house on the edge of the village is a favourite place to stay; of the 11 different rooms, we recommend the Green Room, with its old-style furnishings and four-poster bed. There's a rustling stream flowing through the garden and a nice tearoom (snacks about £4).

SETTLE

☎ 01729 / pop 3621

The largish town of Settle is far too bustling to be really homely and quaint, but it retains enough of its traditional character to make it a worthwhile stop. Narrow cobbled streets lined with shops and decent pubs lead out from the central market square, which still sees stalls and traders every Tuesday. Access from the main A65 to the east is easy, and there are plenty of accommodation options.

THE SETTLE–CARLISLE LINE

The Settle–Carlisle Line (SCL), built between 1869 and 1875, is one of the great engineering achievements of the Victorian era and a very scenic ride to boot. The railway's construction was a Herculean task: 5000 navvies armed with picks and shovels built 325 bridges, 21 viaducts and blasted 14 tunnels in Dickensian conditions that defy the imagination – nearly 200 of them died on the job.

The line was part of the national rail network until 1983, but the public outcry upon its announced closure ensured that it remained open; today it is a huge tourist attraction (as well as a working railway).

The Journey

Trains run between Leeds and Carlisle via Settle about eight times a day. The first section of the journey from Leeds is along the Aire Valley, stopping at Keighley, where the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway branches off to Haworth, Skipton – gateway to the southern Dales – and Settle. The train chugs up the valley beside the River Ribble, through Horton-in-Ribblesdale, across the spectacular Ribblehead Viaduct and then through Blea Moor Tunnel, popping out at Dent station, one of the highest in the country.

It heads upwards and onwards to its highest point (356m) at Ais Gill, before leaving the Dales behind and trundling down to Kirkby Stephen. The last halts are Appleby then Langwathby, just northwest of Penrith (a jumping-off point for the Lake District), then the train finally pulls into Carlisle.

The Nuts & Bolts

The entire journey takes two hours and 40 minutes and costs £35 return. Various hop-on hop-off passes for one or three days are also available. You can pick up a free SCL timetable – which includes a colour map of the line and brief details about places of interest – from most Yorkshire stations; for more information, contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50) or click on to www.settle-carlisle.co.uk or www.settle-carlisle-railway.org.uk.

The **tourist office** (☎ 825192; settle@ytbtic.co.uk; Town Hall; ⏲ 9.30am-5pm) has maps and guidebooks, and an excellent range of local walks leaflets (free).

Sleeping & Eating

Stainforth YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5946; www.yha.org.uk; dm £13.95) A three-star hostel in an old Georgian country house with excellent facilities, including a shop, TV lounge, laundry, barbeque areas and a restaurant as well as a self-catering kitchen. It is 2 miles north of Settle on the B6479 to Horton-in-Ribblesdale.

Golden Lion Hotel (☎ 822203; www.goldenlionhotel.net; Duke St; s/d £41/72, without bathroom £34/60) This handsome 17th-century coaching inn has 12 warm and comfortable rooms, an old-style pub and a pleasant restaurant that is one of the most popular in town (lunch mains about £7, evening £9 to £13).

Around Market Pl are several cafés, including the excellent **Shambles** (☎ 822652; fish & chip supper £6.25) and **Ye Olde Naked Man** (☎ 823230), formerly an undertakers and now a bakery with cakes, snacks and ice cream.

Getting There & Away

The easiest way to get here is by train. From the south, trains from Leeds or Skipton heading for Carlisle (see the boxed text, above) stop at the station near the town centre; those heading for Morecambe (on the west coast) stop at Giggleswick, about 1.5 miles outside town.

AROUND SETTLE

Horton-in-Ribblesdale

☎ 01729 / pop 558

A favourite with walkers, cyclists and cavers, the little village of Horton is 5 miles north of Settle. Everything centres on the **Pen-y-ghent Cafe** (☎ 860333; ⏲ 9am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun), which serves up filling meals, homemade cakes and pint mugs of tea. The friendly owners sell maps, guidebooks and walking gear, and the café acts as the village **tourist office** (horton@ytbtic.co.uk). Walkers on a long hike should avail themselves of the 'safety service', whereby they can register in and out. There's also a post office shop for groceries and takeaways.

SLEEPING & EATING

Horton is popular, so your best bet is to book your accommodation in advance.

Golden Lion (☎ 860206; www.goldenlionhotel.co.uk; dm/s/d £9/27.50/55) Popular with walkers, the Golden Lion is a lively pub with dorms and basic private rooms upstairs, and three public bars downstairs where you can tuck into a bit of grub and wash it down with a pint of hand-pumped ale. It also does evening meals (three courses £10) and makes packed lunches (£4.95). Breakfast (£6.50) is not included.

Crown Hotel (☎ 860209; www.crown-hotel.co.uk; s/d from £28.50/54) Another popular rest stop with walkers, the Crown has a variety of basic rooms (with slightly over-the-top floral patterns) and a cosy bar that serves a range of meals.

Other options:

Dub-Cote Farm Camping Barn (☎ 860238; www.threepeaksbarn.co.uk; dm £9.50) A basic-but-lovely 17th-century stone barn half a mile southeast of the village, well equipped with self-catering facilities (BYO sleeping bag and pillow case).

Knoll (☎ 860283; s/d £28/48; 🕓 Mar-Oct) A handsome house near the village centre with the Pennine Way on its doorstep.

Three Peaks

The countryside north of Settle is dominated by the Three Peaks – Whernside (735m), Ingleborough (723m) and Pen-y-ghent (694m) – and the summits are linked by a long circular route that has been a classic walk for many years. The traditional start is the Pen-y-ghent Cafe in Horton-in-Ribblesdale and walkers try to complete the whole 25-mile route in under 12 hours. Others knock it off in six hours or less. You can also do just a section of the walk – for instance walking from Horton as far as Ribblehead, and returning by train – which is highly recommended.

HAWES

☎ 01969 / pop 700

Hawes is right at the heart of Wensleydale and probably the best base for exploring the northern Yorkshire Dales. The main street and the narrow lanes off it are lined with everything you'll need, from shops to ATMs.

The **tourist office** (☎ 667450; hawes@ytbtic.co.uk; 🕓 10am-5pm) shares the Old Station building with the **Dales Countryside Museum** (adult/child £3/free), a beautifully presented social history of the area. There's still an old train in the yard too.

About 1.5 miles north of town is **Hardraw Force**, the highest above-ground waterfall in the country. For most of the year it's little more than a trickle on the rocks and not really worth the £1 'toll' you pay at the Green Dragon pub to walk up to it.

Sleeping & Eating

Bainbridge Ings Caravan & Camp Site (☎ 667354; www.bainbridge-ings.co.uk; car & 2 adults/hikers & cyclists £9.50/3.50) Tent sites are around the edges of stone-walled fields located around a spacious farmhouse about half a mile east of town. Gas, milk and eggs are sold on-site.

Hawes YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5854; www.yha.org.uk; Town Head; dm £13.95) A modern place on the western edge of town, at the junction of the main A684 (Aysgarth Rd) and B6255.

Green Dragon Inn (☎ 667392; www.greendragonhardraw.co.uk; Hardraw; s/d with breakfast £28/49, without breakfast from £22/40) About 1.5 miles north of town is this 'famous' inn where you pay the fee for the nearby waterfall. It's terrific, with unspectacular but thoroughly comfortable rooms, good beer, home-cooked food (mains about £6) and live bands at weekends.

Cocketts (☎ 667312; www.cocketts.co.uk; Market Pl; d from £58) The most stylish place in town is a handsome 17th-century stone house with eight pretty delightful rooms decorated in traditional style, two with four-poster beds. Two-/three-course meals in the restaurant are £17/19.

There are plenty of pubs, including the **Fountain** (☎ 667206; Market Pl; bar food about £6). The traditional **White Hart** (Market Pl; pub grub about £8) is also good for a pint or a bar meal.

Getting There & Away

Hawes is a public transport nightmare. From Northallerton, buses 156/157 run to Hawes (two hours, four Monday to Friday) via Leyburn, where you can connect with transport to/from Richmond. On Sunday (March to October) there are buses to Hawes from Manchester (X43) via Skipton and Grassington, and from Leeds (803). Between Hawes and the Lake District, bus 112 runs to/from Kendal (90 minutes, twice daily), very early in the morning and late in the evening, with a few extra services on some other weekdays. The tourist office can advise on other bus services aimed at visitors.

RICHMOND

☎ 01748 / pop 8178

If Richmond was at the heart of the English tourist trail, you'd probably have to jostle for position with busloads of tourists and film crews, for this is surely one of England's most handsome market towns. Instead, you can have this gorgeous town pretty much to yourself – from the cobbled centre right up to the rocky outcrop overlooking the rushing River Swale and the ruins of the massive castle.

Orientation & Information

Richmond is east of the Yorkshire Dales National Park but makes a good gateway for the northern area. Centre of everything is Trinity Church Sq (with market day on Saturday). Just north of here, the **tourist office** (☎ 850252; www.richmond.org.uk; Friary Gardens, Victoria Rd; 🕓 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) has the usual maps and guides, plus several leaflets (around 80p) showing walks in town and the surrounding countryside.

Sights

Top of the pile is the impressive heap that's left of **Richmond Castle** (EH; ☎ 822493; admission £3.60; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar), founded in 1070 and one of the first castles in England since Roman times to be built of stone. The best part of a visit is the view from the top of the remarkably well-preserved 30m-high tower; you can look down on the market place or over the surrounding hills.

The **Richmondshire Museum** (☎ 825611; Ryder's Wynd; adult/child £2/1; 🕓 10.30am-4.30pm Easter-Oct) is a delightful little gem, with very informative staff and local history exhibits including an early Yorkshire cave-dweller, James Herriot's surgery, and informative displays on lead mining, which forever altered the Swaledale landscape a century ago.

Activities

West from Richmond walkers can follow paths along the River Swale, upstream and downstream from the town. A longer option is along the north side of Swaledale, following the famous long-distance Coast to Coast route (p501) all the way to Reeth. For a grand day out, take the first bus from Richmond to Reeth then walk back; the tourist office has route and bus time details.

Cyclists can also follow Swaledale: as far as Reeth may be enough, while a trip to Keld, then over the high wild moors to Kirkby Stephen is a more serious but very rewarding 33-mile undertaking.

Sleeping

Frenchgate Hotel (☎ 822087; www.frenchgatehotel.com; 59-61 Frenchgate; s/d from £58/98; P) Eight immaculate bedrooms occupy the upper floors of this converted Georgian town house, now an elegant boutique guesthouse. One of the bedrooms has a beautiful canopied bed, which fits somewhat snugly into the room (the others are equally compact). Downstairs there's a hospitable lounge with oak beams and an open fire.

King's Head Hotel (☎ 850220; www.kingsheadrichmond.co.uk; Market Pl; s/d £80/112) Right on Market Pl, Richmond's fanciest hotel was once described by the painter Turner as 'the finest in Richmondshire'. That was a long time ago. It's still pretty fancy though; each of the traditionally furnished 30 bedrooms have wrought-iron or hardwood beds and plenty of comfort.

our pick **Millgate House** (☎ 823571; www.millgatehouse.com; Market Pl; r £85-95; P 💻) Behind the unassuming green door and plaque is the unexpected pleasure of one of the nicest guesthouses in England. While the house itself is wonderful, it is overshadowed by the breathtaking and multi-award-winning garden at the back, which has views over the River Swale and the Cleveland Hills. If you can, go for the Garden Suite.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

One of England's best-kept secrets is the elegant Georgian town of Richmond: a maze of cobbled streets guarded by the ruins of its massive **castle** (left).

Base yourself in the truly exceptional **Millgate House** (above), with a marvellous garden that will be hard to leave if the weather is in any way clement. On Saturday, explore the town itself, take in a museum or two and clamber about the ruins of the castle.

From the castle tower you will catch a glimpse of the northern section of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, which should be the focus of your Sunday activities.

There's a batch of pleasant places along Frenchgate, and several more on Maison Dieu and Pottergate (the road into town from the east). These include **Pottergate Guesthouse** (☎ 823 826; gary53uk@hotmail.com; 4 Pottergate), **66 Frenchgate** (☎ 823421; paul@66french.freeserve.co.uk; 66 Frenchgate) and **Emmanuel House** (☎ 823584; 41 Maison Dieu). Singles/doubles cost about £25/50.

Eating & Drinking

Trinity Church Sq and the surrounding streets have a huge choice of pubs, teashops, cafés and takeaways.

Frenchgate Café (☎ 824949; 29 Frenchgate; lunches about £5, evening mains £7-12; 🕒 10am-10pm Tue-Sun) An all-meals-in-one kind of place, here you can tuck into a tidy breakfast in the morning, a large sandwich or pasta dish at lunch and enjoy the delights of its quasi-Continental bistro menu in the evening.

A Taste of Thailand (☎ 829696; 15 King St; mains about £10; 🕒 dinner only) Does exactly what it says on the tin. An extensive menu of Thai favourites and a convenient BYO policy.

Surprisingly, despite a vast choice, few of the pubs in Richmond are up to much. After extensive research, the best we found was the **Black Lion Hotel** (☎ 823121; Finkle St), with cosy bars, low beams, good beer and food (bar food £5, mains in restaurant about £9.50), plus B&B.

Getting There & Away

From Darlington (on the railway between London and Edinburgh) it's easy to reach Richmond on bus 34 (30 minutes, hourly, four on Sunday). All buses stop in Trinity Church Sq.

EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

Its Viking roots still present in the name, the East Riding of Yorkshire (from Old Danish *Thriding*, or third) was one of three administrative regions of the Danelaw created in the 9th century – west and north ridings are now the slightly less evocative West and North Yorkshire.

The county's beating heart is the tough old sea dog of Hull, a no-nonsense port that goes about its business with little fuss between the broad horizons of the Rivers Humber and Hull.

Activities

The Yorkshire Wolds are ideal for gentle walks and cycle tours. Whether you're on two feet or two wheels, the town of Beverley makes a good base, and the northern Wolds can also be easily reached from York.

The area's main long-distance walk is the 80-mile **Wolds Way**. This national trail starts at Hessle, 4 miles west of Hull, close to the Humber Bridge, and leads northwards through farmland, hills and quiet villages, to the tip of Filey Brigg, a peninsula on the east coast just north of the town of Filey. Billed as 'Yorkshire's best-kept secret', it takes five days, and is an excellent beginners' walk, as the landscape is not high and conditions not too strenuous.

The Cleveland Way (p545) also ends at Filey, and for a shorter walk in bracing sea air you can follow the Cleveland Way along a scenic stretch of coast northwards from Filey to Scarborough.

Getting There & Around

Hull is easily reached by rail from Leeds, York, Beverley, Filey and Scarborough, and is also the hub for regional bus services. There's a useful website at www.gettingaround.eastriding.gov.uk.

HULL

☎ 01482 / pop 301,416

Tough, uncompromising Hull is a curmudgeonly English seaport with a proud seafaring tradition, a hard-bitten attitude to all things in life, and an almost lunatic nightlife – surely its only concession to any kind of indulgence. Its full and proper name – Kingston-upon-Hull – seems like an unnecessary extravagance when plain old Hull will do, and it seems apt that jaundiced, rueful poet Philip Larkin (1922–85) presided over its university library for many years.

Orientation & Information

The Old Town of Hull, which retains a sense of the prosperous Victorian era, is bounded by Ferensway and Freetown Way and the Rivers Humber and Hull. Perched on the waterfront overlooking the Humber is the city's main attraction, the Deep aquarium. It's all walkable.

Central library (☎ 223344; Albion St) For internet access.
Post office (57 Jameson St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 223559; www.hullcc.gov.uk; 1 Paragon St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun)
Waterstone's (☎ 580234; 19-21 Jameson St)

Sights

THE DEEP

The colossal, angled monolith that is the **Deep** (☎ 381000; www.thedeep.co.uk; Tower St; adult/child £8/6; 🕒 10am-6pm, last entry 5pm) stands at the edge of the port, with great views across the Humber. Inside it's just as dramatic, as echoing commentaries and computer-generated interactives run you through the formation of the seas, and onwards. The largest aquarium contains 2.5 million litres of water (and 87 tonnes of salt) and even has a glass lift. To get a good view of the tank's seven different types of sharks, eels, rays and other watery dwellers, it's best (if more pedestrian) to take the stairs, as the lift ride is over no sooner than you start it. And it's rare you see a pod full of people zoom through a tank.

OTHER SIGHTS

Hull has a remarkable collection of city-run **museums** (☎ 613902; www.hullcc.gov.uk/museums; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-4.30pm Sun). All share the same phone number and opening hours and are free.

The serene **Ferens Art Gallery** (Queen Victoria Sq), built in 1927, has a decent collection that includes works by Stanley Spencer and Peter Blake.

The dusty-feeling but interesting **Maritime Museum**, in the former dock offices (1871), celebrates Hull's long maritime traditions, and includes some daunting whale skeletons.

The well-preserved High St has some eclectic museums. The **Streetlife Transport Museum** has re-created 1930s streets, all sorts of historic vehicles to get on and off, and a pleasant garden. Next door, attractive, Georgian **Wilberforce House** (1639) was the birthplace in 1759 of the antislavery crusader William Wilberforce. It covers the history of slavery and the campaign against it – a major renovation saw its closure through 2006 but at the time of writing it was expected to reopen early in 2007. Behind it is the **Arctic Corsair**; tours demonstrate the hardships of trawling in the Arctic Circle.

The **Hull & East Riding Museum** traces local history from Roman times to the present, with new Anglo-Saxon, medieval and geology galleries.

At the heart of the Old Town, **Holy Trinity Church** (☎ 324835; Market Pl; 🕒 11am-2pm Tue-Fri Oct-Mar, 11am-3pm Mon-Fri & 9.30am-noon Sat Apr-Sep, services Sun year-round) is a magnificent 15th-century building with a striking central tower, and a long, tall, unified interior worthy of a cathedral. It features huge areas of windows, built to keep the weight of the walls down as the soil here is unstable.

Built in 1927, the **Spurn Lightship** is now anchored in the marina. It once provided guidance for ships navigating the notorious Humber estuary.

Sleeping & Eating

Good accommodation options are pretty thin on the ground – most of them are made up of business-oriented hotels and mediocre guesthouses. The tourist office will help book accommodation for free.

Clyde House Hotel (☎ 214981; www.clydehousehotel.co.uk; 13 John St; s/d £30/50) Next to leafy Kingston Sq, Clyde House Hotel is one of the best B&B options near the Old Town. The rooms are nothing fancy, but they're very tidy and comfortable.

Kingston Theatre Hotel (☎ 225828; www.kingstontheatrehotel.com; 1-2 Kingston Sq; s/d/ste from £40/55/90) This 19th-century building is a privately owned hotel in a quiet part of the centre. The rooms are perfectly charming if not quite memorable; upgrade to a suite if you're looking for a little leg room.

Venn (☎ 224004; www.vennrestaurant.co.uk; 21 Scale Lane; brasserie mains £7-10, restaurant mains £18-24; 🕒 Tue-Sat) Modern British cuisine in all its cool, posh guises hits Hull and – guess what? – sticks nicely. This trendy brasserie serves fancy sandwiches, pizzas and salads, while the more upmarket upstairs restaurant goes to town with dishes such as leg and saddle of local rabbit with Parma ham…gorgeous.

Cerutti (☎ 328501; 10 Nelson St; mains about £13; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Hull's best Italian restaurant is an attractive spot that specialises – unsurprisingly – in seafood.

Entertainment

Come nightfall – especially at weekends – Hull gets raucous and often rowdy. What else did you expect from sea dogs in a seaport? Groups of dangerously underdressed kids party like tomorrow doesn't matter. If you're that pissed, it won't.

Welly Club (☎ 326131, 221676; 105-107 Beverley Rd; admission free-£5; 🕒 till 2am, closed Wed & Sun) Best known these days for its devotion to trance and drum 'n' bass, this is the place to go if you like your beats hard and extremely fast.

Lamp (☎ 326131; 2 Norfolk St) One of the more modern watering holes in town, with DJs, cocktails, a plush atmosphere and all the other devices to attract the beautiful kids.

Hull Truck Theatre (☎ 323638; www.hulltruck.co.uk; Spring St) Home to acclaimed down-to-earth playwright John Godber, it presents vibrant drama, comedy and Sunday jazz. It's just northwest of the Old Town.

Hull New Theatre (☎ 226655; Kingston Sq) A traditional regional theatre hosting popular drama, concerts and musicals.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is on Ferensway, just north of the train station. National Express has buses to/from London (£21.50, 5¾ hours, two daily) and Manchester (£12.75, 4¼ hours, one daily). Both National Express and bus X46 run frequently to/from York (£6.25, 1¾ hours). Local services also leave from here.

The train station is west of Queen Victoria Sq, in the town centre. Hull has good rail links north and south, as well as west to York (£13.50, 1¼ hours, hourly) and Leeds (£13.10, one hour, hourly).

The ferry port is 3 miles east of the centre at King George Dock. A bus to/from the train station connects with the ferries. For details of departures, see p968.

BEVERLEY

☎ 01482 / pop 29,110

Handsome, unspoilt Beverley is one of the most attractive of Yorkshire towns largely on account of its magnificent minster – a rival to any cathedral in England – and the tangle of streets that lie beneath it, each brimming with exquisite Georgian and Victorian buildings.

Orientation & Information

Beverley is small and easily walked to from either the train or bus stations. There's a large market in the main square on Saturday.

Beverley Bookshop (☎ 0800 616394; 16 Butcher Row)

Library (☎ 885355; Champney Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon & Wed, 9.30am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Internet access and a small art gallery with changing exhibitions.

Post office (Register Sq; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 391672; www.visiteastyorkshire.com; 34 Butcher Row; 🕒 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.45pm Sat year-round, plus 10am-2pm Sun Jun-Aug)

Sights

The third church to be built on this site (the first was constructed during the 7th century), **Beverley Minster** (☎ 868540; www.beverleyminster.org; admission by donation; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Aug, 9am-5pm Sep, Oct, Mar & Apr, 9am-4pm Nov-Feb, also noon-4pm Sun year-round) dates from 1220, but construction continued for two centuries, spanning the Early English, Decorated and perpendicular periods. Hailed for its unity of forms, the church has a magnificent Gothic perpendicular west front (1390–1420).

Inside, the nave is strikingly high. Extraordinary medieval faces and demons peer down from every possible vantage point, while expressive stone musicians play silent instruments. Note particularly the 10th-century *fridstol* (Old English for 'peace chair') which gave sanctuary to anyone escaping the law; the fruit- and angel-laden Gothic canopy of the Percy Tomb; the 68 medieval misericords (the largest collection in the country) and the late Norman font (c 1170).

There's an interesting display showing the history of the minster and town. Check out the rebuilt treadwheel crane, where workers ground around like hapless hamsters to lift the huge loads necessary to build such medieval structures.

Doomed to play second fiddle to the mother church, **St Mary's** (☎ 865709; admission free; 🕒 9.15am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.30pm Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 2-4.15pm Oct-Mar) is a glorious church, built in stages between 1120 and 1530. In the North Choir Aisle look out for a carving (c 1330) thought to have inspired Lewis Carroll's White Rabbit. The West Front is considered one of England's finest (early 15th century).

Sleeping & Eating

Friary YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5696; www.yha.org.uk; Friar's Lane; dm £11.95; 🕒 Mon-Sat Easter-end Oct) Here's your chance to stay in a beautiful, restored 14th-century Dominican friary mentioned in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. This place might just have the best setting in town, only 100m southeast of the minster.

Number One (☎ 862752; http://numberone-bedandbreakfast-beverley.co.uk; 1 Woodlands; s/d from £25/50) Three very comfortable rooms in a friendly, welcoming house packed with pictures, books and bric-a-brac just west of the town centre.

Eastgate Guest House (☎ 868464; 7 Eastgate; s/d £41/53, without bathroom from £27/42) This relatively central B&B is highly recommended for sheer friendliness and relaxed atmosphere more than for the floral, simple rooms.

Swallow Beverley Arms (☎ 869241; www.swallowhotels.com; North Bar Within; s/d from £56/92) Beverley's top spot is a very elegant Georgian coaching house with all the trimmings, a handsome combination of old-world style and contemporary comfort.

White Horse Inn (☎ 861973; 22 Hengate; mains £7-9; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Also known as Nellie's, this lovely, dimly lit place has rambling rooms, open fires and tables outside. There's regular live music and poetry.

Cerutti 2 (☎ 866700; Station Sq; mains £10-19; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) The only restaurant of note in town is unusually positioned inside the old waiting room of the train station. Italian dishes of all kinds are on offer, without the seafood leanings of its sister restaurant in Hull. Attached is the 'C' Horse Delicatessen, perfect for takeaway meals.

Getting There & Away

The train station lies east of the town centre. The bus station is north on Sow Hill.

Bus X46/X47 links Beverley with York (70 minutes, hourly). There are frequent services to Hull (buses 121, 122, 246 and X46/X47, 30 minutes).

There are regular trains to/from Scarborough via Filey (£11.90, 1½ hours). Trains to/from Hull (20 minutes) run at least hourly.

Details on boats to Hull from northern Europe are given in the main Transport chapter, p968.

NORTH YORKSHIRE

The largest of Yorkshire's four counties is also the most beautiful, if only because unlike the rest of northern England, mills and mines are nowhere to be found. Blissfully free of the landmarks of the Industrial Revolution, North Yorkshire has, since the Middle Ages, always been about sheep and the woolly wealth that they produced.

Much of North Yorkshire's untamed, untouched quality is preserved within the confines of the county's two superb national parks – the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors. But the county's star attraction is unquestionably urban. Sure, the genteel spa town of Harrogate and the blowsy, dramatically situated resorts of Scarborough and Whitby have many fans, but literally nothing compares to the unparalleled splendour of York, northern England's most visited town.

Activities

The best walking and cycling is in the Yorkshire Dales (p518) and the North York Moors (p545).

Getting There & Around

The main gateway town is York and a web of buses and trains connect places in North Yorkshire. More specific details on the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors are given in those sections. For countywide information, call the national **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608). There are various Explorer passes, and individual bus and train companies also offer their own saver schemes, so it's always worth asking for advice on the best deal when you buy your ticket.

YORK

☎ 01904 / pop 137,505

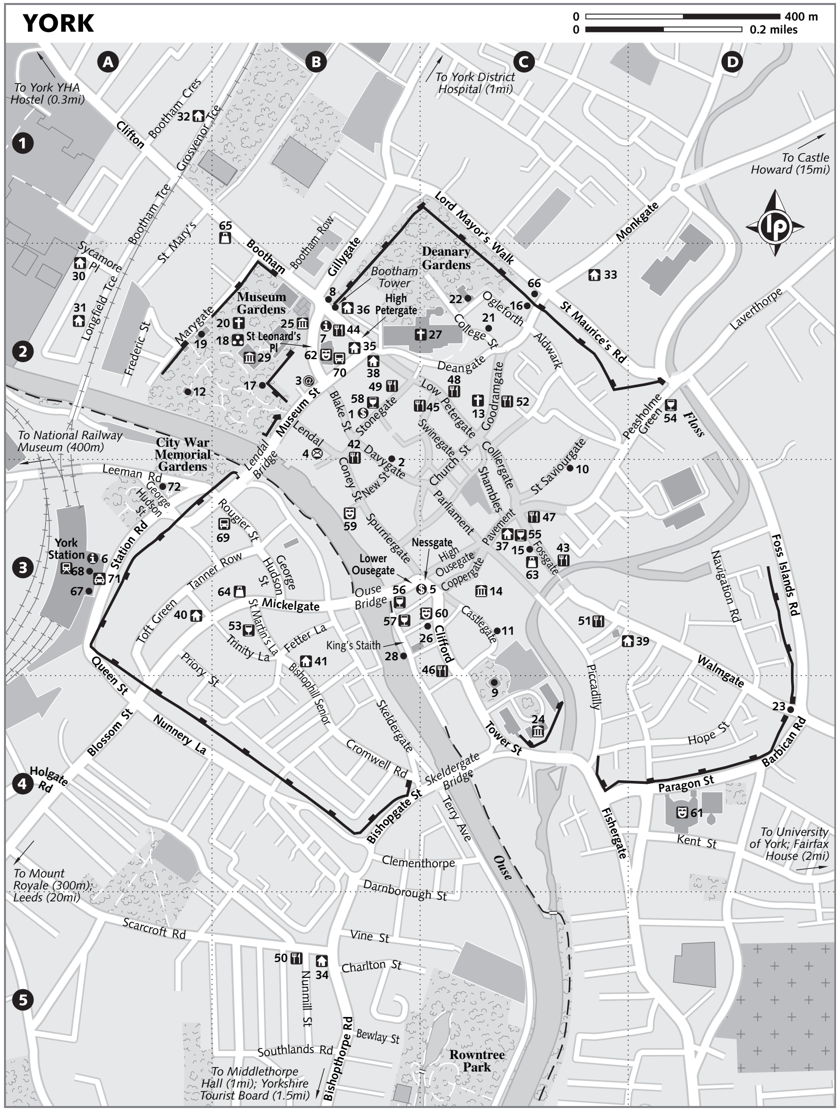
Nowhere in northern England says 'medieval' quite like York, a city of extraordinary cultural and historical wealth that has lost little of its preindustrial lustre. Its medieval spider's web of narrow streets is enclosed by a magnificent circuit of 13th-century walls. At its heart lies the immense, awe-inspiring minster, one of the most beautiful Gothic cathedrals in the world. The city's long history and rich heritage is woven into virtually every brick and beam; modern, tourist-oriented York – with its myriad museums, restaurants, cafés and traditional pubs – is a carefully maintained heir to that heritage.

Orientation

Compact and eminently walkable, York has five major landmarks to take note of: the wall enclosing the small city centre; the minster at the northern corner; Clifford's Tower at the southern end; the River Ouse that cuts the centre in two; and the train station to the west. Just to avoid the inevitable confusion, remember that round these parts 'gate' means street and 'bar' means gate.

Information

American Express (Amex; ☎ 676501; 6 Stonegate; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) With foreign exchange service.



YORK

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
A
B
C
D
1
2
3
4
5
To York YHA Hostel (0.3mi)
To York District Hospital (1mi)
To Castle Howard (15mi)
To National Railway Museum (400m)
To University of York; Fairfax House (2mi)
To Mount Royale (300m); Leeds (20mi)
To Middlethorpe Hall (1mi); Yorkshire Tourist Board (1.5mi)
Clifton
Bootham Cres
Grosvenor Tce
Bootham Tce
St Mary's
Sycamore Pl
Longfield Tce
Frederic St
Bootham
Bootham Row
Gillygate
Lord Mayor's Walk
Monkgate
Deanery Gardens
Bootham Tower
High Petergate
Museum Gardens
Marygate
St Leonard's Pl
Ogleforth
College St
Aldwark
St Maurice's Rd
Deangate
Low Petergate
Goodramgate
Museum St
Blake St
Stonegate
Lendal
Lendal Bridge
Davygate
Swinegate
Church St
Colliergate
St Saviourgate
Peaseholme Green
Foss
Laverthorpe
City War Memorial Gardens
Leeman Rd
George Hudson St
Station Rd
Rougier St
Coney St
New St
Spurriergate
Parliament St
Shambles
Pavement
Fossgate
York Station
Tanner Row
Nessgate
Lower Ousegate
High Ousegate
Coppergate
Ouse Bridge
Micklegate
Toft Green
St Martin's La
Fetter La
Trinity La
Priory St
Bishophill Senior
King's Staith
Clifford St
Castlegate
Piccadilly
Navigation Rd
Foss Islands Rd
Walmgate
Queen St
Blossom St
Nunnery La
Holgate Rd
Skeldergate
Cromwell Rd
Skeldergate Bridge
Tower St
Hope St
Barbican Rd
Paragon St
Bishopgate St
Terry Ave
Fishergate
Kent St
Ouse
Clementhorpe
Darnborough St
Scarcroft Rd
Vine St
Charlton St
Nunmill St
Bewlay St
Southlands Rd
Bishopthorpe Rd
Rowntree Park

Borders (☎ 653300; 1-5 Davygate; 🕑 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) Well-stocked bookshop.
City Library (☎ 552815; Museum St; 🕑 9am-8pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 5.30pm Thu, to 4pm Sat; per 30min £1) Internet access.
Post office (22 Lendal; 🕑 8.30am-5.30pm Mon & Tue, 9am-5.30pm Wed-Sat)
This Is York (www.thisisyork.co.uk)
Thomas Cook (☎ 653626; 4 Nessgate) A travel agent offering a full service.
Tourist office (☎ 550099; www.visityork.org; De Grey Rooms, Exhibition Sq; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) There's another branch at the train station.
York District Hospital (☎ 631313; Wiggington Rd) A mile north of the centre.

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Sights

YORK MINSTER

Get your camera ready. Make sure your neck muscles are loose and relaxed. Prepare to be bowled over. England's largest medieval cathedral and Yorkshire's most important historic building is the simply awesome **minster** (☎ 624426; www.yorkminster.org; adult/child/concession £5/free/4, undercroft £4/2/3, minster & undercroft £7/5/5; 🕑 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3.45pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3.45pm Sun Nov-Mar, undercroft, treasury & crypt 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Sep-Jun, to 5.30pm Jul & Aug) that dominates the city. Seat of the archbishop of York, the primate of England, it is second in importance only to Canterbury, home of the primate of *all* England (the two titles were given to settle a debate over whether York or Canterbury was the true centre of the church in England), but that's where Canterbury's superiority ends, for this is without doubt one of the world's most beautiful Gothic buildings. If this is the only cathedral you visit in England, you'll still walk away satisfied – so long as you have the patience to deal with the constant flow of school groups and organised tours that will invariably clog up your viewfinder.

The first church on the site was a wooden chapel built for Paulinus' baptism of King Edwin on Easter Day 627; its site is marked in the crypt. With deliberate symbolism, the church was built on the site of a Roman basilica, a vast central assembly hall; parts can be seen in the foundations. A stone church was started but fell into disrepair after Edwin's death. St Wilfred built the next church but this was destroyed during William the Conqueror's brutal suppression of the north. The first Norman church was built in stages to 1080; you can see surviving fragments in the foundations and crypt.

The present building, built mainly from 1220 to 1480, manages to represent all the major stages of Gothic architectural development. The transepts were built in Early English style between 1220 and 1255; the octagonal chapter house was built between 1275 and 1290 in the Decorated style; the nave from 1291 to 1340; and the west towers, west front and central (lantern) tower were built in perpendicular style from 1470 to 1472.

You enter from the south transept, which was badly damaged by fire in 1984 but has now been fully restored. To your right is the 15th-century **choir screen** depicting the 15 kings from William I to Henry VI. Facing you is the magnificent **Five Sisters Window**, with five lancets over 15m high. This is the minster's oldest complete window; most of its tangle of glass dates from around 1250. Just beyond it to the right is the 13th-century **chapter house**, a fine example of the Decorated style. Sinuous stonework surrounds a wonderful uninterrupted space. There are more than 200 expressive carved heads and figures.

Back in the main church, you should notice the unusually wide and tall nave, the aisles (to the sides) of which are roofed in stone in contrast to the central roof, which is wood painted to look like stone. On both sides of the nave are painted stone shields of the nobles who met Edward II at a parliament in York. Also note the **dragon's head** projecting from the gallery – it's a crane believed to have been used to lift a font cover. There are several fine **windows** dating from the early 14th century, but the most dominating is the **Great West Window**, from 1338, with beautiful stone tracery.

Beyond the screen and the choir is the **lady chapel** and, behind it, the **high altar**, which is dominated by the huge **Great East Window** (1405). At 23.7m by 9.4m – roughly the size of a tennis court – it is the world's largest medieval stained-glass window and the cathedral's single most important treasure. Needless to say, its epic size matches the epic theme depicted within: the beginning and end of the world as described in Genesis and the Book of Revelations.

YORK: FROM THE BEGINNING

It seems everybody has wanted a piece of this land at some point in history. In AD 71 the Romans built a fort called Erboracum here, so their troops would have somewhere to sleep after a busy day bashing the local tribes. Over time, a largish civilian settlement grew up around the fort; by the time Constantine the Great was proclaimed emperor here in AD 306 it was a fully fledged town. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the town was taken by the Anglo-Saxons who renamed it Eoforwic and made it the capital of the independent kingdom of Northumbria.

In 625 a Roman priest called Paulinus came to town and converted the king and all his nobles. Two years later, they built the first wooden church; for most of the next century the city was a major centre of learning, attracting students from all over Europe.

The student party lasted until 866, when the next wave of invaders arrived. This time it was those marauding Vikings, who chucked everybody out and gave the town a more tongue-friendly name, Jorvik. It was to be their capital for the next 100 years, and during that time they put a rest to their pillaging ways and turned the city into an important trading port.

Danish rule ended in 954 when King Eadred of Wessex drove out the last Viking king and reunited Danelaw with the south, but trouble brewed again in 1066 when King Harold II got his comeuppance at the hands of William the Conqueror at Hastings.

Willie exercised his own brand of tough love in York. After his two wooden castles were captured by an Anglo-Scandinavian army, he torched the whole city (and Durham) and the surrounding countryside so that the rebels knew who was boss – the 'harrying of the north'. The Normans then set about rebuilding the city, including a new minster. From that moment, everything in York was rosy – except for a blip in 1137 when the whole city caught fire – and over the next 300 years it prospered through royal patronage, textiles, trade and the church.

No sooner did the church finally get built, though, than the city went into full recession. In the 15th century Hull took over as the region's main port and the textile industry moved elsewhere. Henry VIII's inability to keep a wife and the ensuing brouhaha with the church that resulted in the Reformation also hit York pretty hard. However, Henry established a branch of the King's Council here to help govern the north, and this was to contribute to the city's recovery under Elizabeth I and James I.

The council was abolished during Charles I's reign, but the king established his court here during the Civil War, which drew the devastating attentions of the Parliamentarians. They besieged the rabidly pro-monarchist York for three months in 1644, but by a fortunate accident of history their leader was a local chap called Sir Thomas Fairfax, who prevented his troops from setting York alight, thereby preserving the city and the minster.

Not much happened after that. Throughout the 18th century the city was a fashionable social centre dominated by the aristocracy, who were drawn by its culture and new racecourse. When the railway was built in 1839 thousands of people were employed in the new industries that sprung up around it, such as confectionary. These industries went into decline in the latter half of the 20th century, but by then a new invader was asking for directions at the city gates, armed only with a guidebook.

The minster's heart is dominated by the awesome **central tower** (adult/child £3.50/2; 🕓 every 30min 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, to 6.30pm Jul & Aug, to 30min before dusk Nov-Mar), which is well worth climbing for the unparalleled views of York. You'll have to tackle a fairly claustrophobic climb of 275 steps and, most probably, a queue of people with cameras in hand. Access to the tower is near the entrance in the south transept, which is dominated by the exquisite **Rose Window** commemorating the union of the royal houses of Lancaster and York, through the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, which ended the Wars of the Roses and began the Tudor dynasty (see p48).

Another set of stairs in the south transept leads down to the **undercroft**, where you'll also find the **treasury** and the **crypt**. These should on no account be missed. In 1967 the foundations were excavated when the central tower threatened to collapse; while engineers worked frantically to save the building, archaeologists uncovered Roman and Norman ruins that attest to the site's ancient history – one of the most extraordinary finds is a Roman culvert, still carrying water to the Ouse. The treasury houses 11th-century artefacts, including relics from the graves of medieval archbishops. The crypt contains fragments from the Norman cathedral, including the font showing King Edwin's baptism that also marks the site of Paulinus' original wooden chapel.

AROUND THE MINSTER

Owned by the minster since the 15th century, **St William's College** (☎ 637134; College St) is an attractive half-timbered Tudor building with elegant oriel windows built for the minster's chantry priests.

The **Treasurer's House** (NT; ☎ 624247; Minster Yard; admission £5, house & basement £7; 🕓 11am-4.30pm Sat-Thu Apr-Oct) was home to the minster's medieval treasurers. Substantially rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries, the 13 rooms house a fine collection of furniture and supply a good insight into 18th-century life. The house is also the setting for one of the city's most enduring ghost stories: during the 1950s, a plumber working in the basement swore he saw a band of Roman soldiers walking *through* the walls; his story remains popular if unproven – but you can explore the cellar to find out.

THE YORK PASS

If you plan on seeing virtually everything in town, we strongly recommend the **York Pass** (1/2/3 days adult £19/25/32, child £10/16/22); it grants you free access to every single pay-in sight in town, as well as free passage on a handful of tours, including the Citysightseeing bus tour (see p533). It is available at the tourist offices.

CITY WALLS

You can get onto the walls, built in the 13th century, via steps by **Bootham Bar** (on the site of a Roman gate) and follow them clockwise to Monk Bar, a walk offering particularly beautiful views of the minster. There are oodles more access points including off Station Rd and Monk Bar.

Monk Bar is the best-preserved medieval gate, with a small **Richard III Museum** (☎ 634191; www.richardiiimuseum.co.uk; admission £2.50; 🕓 9am-5pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Feb) upstairs. The museum sets out the case of the murdered 'Princes in the Tower' and invites visitors to judge whether their uncle, Richard III, killed them (see p48).

Walmgate Bar is England's only city gate with an intact barbican (an extended gateway to ward off uninvited guests); it was built during the reign of Edward III.

MERCHANT ADVENTURERS' HALL

Built between 1357 and 1361, the outstanding **Merchant Adventurers' Hall** (☎ 654818; Fossgate; admission £2; 🕓 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-3.30pm Fri & Sat, noon-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is one of the most handsome timber-framed buildings in Europe. This stunning building testifies to the power of the medieval guilds, which controlled all foreign trade into and out of York until 1830 – a handy little monopoly.

JORVIK

Interactive bells-and-whistles exhibits aimed at 'bringing history to life' usually result in the opposite, but the much-trumpeted **Jorvik** (☎ 543403; www.vikingjorvik.com; Coppergate; adult/child £7.20/5.10, Jorvik & Dig £11/8.30; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar), the most visited attraction in town besides the minster, manages to convey the essence of the Viking settlement with admirable success. It's a smells-and-all reconstruction of the settlement unearthed in this area during excavations in the late 1970s, brought to you courtesy of a 'time-car' monorail that transports you through 9th-century Jorvik.

It is a bit of fun (for kids at least) and the staff in the ubiquitous shop go to great lengths to answer questions with great enthusiasm. To cut the queue time considerably, book your tickets online – it only costs £1 more.

DIG

York's newest attraction, run by the folks who brought you Jorvik, is **Dig** (☎ 543403; www.vikingjorvik.com; St Saviour's Church, St Saviourgate; adult/child £5.50/5, Dig & Jorvik £11/8.30; 🕒 10am-5pm), which is pretty much self explanatory. This time, you're an 'archaeological detective', unearthing the 'secrets' of York's distant past as well as discovering something of the archaeologist's world – what they do, how they do it and that kind of thing. Much more hands-on than Jorvik, it is plenty of fun and a little bit educational too.

CLIFFORD'S TOWER

There's precious little left of York Castle except for this evocative stone **tower** (EH; ☎ 646940; admission £2.30; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), a highly unusual figure-eight design built into the castle's keep after the original one was destroyed in 1190 during anti-Jewish riots. An angry mob forced 150 Jews to be locked inside the tower, where the hapless victims took their own lives rather than be killed. There's not much to see inside but the views over the city are excellent.

YORK CASTLE MUSEUM

Near Clifford's Tower, this excellent **museum** (☎ 653611; adult/child £6.50/5, with Yorkshire Museum £9.50/5; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) contains displays of everyday life from the last four centuries, with reconstructed domestic interiors, and a less-than-homely prison cell where you can try out the condemned man's bed – in this case Dick Turpin's. There's a bewildering array of evocative everyday objects, gathered together by a certain Dr Kirk from the 1920s onwards for fear that the items would become obsolete and disappear completely. He wasn't far wrong, which makes this place all the more interesting.

NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

Most railway museums are the sole preserve of lone men with dog-eared notebooks and grandfathers looking to bond with their grandchildren. While there's no shortage of either here, this **museum** (☎ 621261; www.nrm.org.uk; Leeman Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm) stands apart on account of its sheer size and incredible collection. Trainspotters and nostalgics will salivate at the massive gathering of engines and carriages from the past, but the attractions for regular folk are the gleaming carriages of the royal trains used by Queen Victoria and Edward VII; the speed-record-breaking *Mallard* (a mighty 2 miles a minute in 1938, still a record for a steam train); and a Series 'O' Japanese bullet train (1964–86), which you can sit in – it is a testament to the speed of technology that the train now appears a tad dated. Just next to it is a **simulator** (£3), which allows you to travel from London to Brighton in real time at supersonic speed – the journey takes four minutes. You can also wander around a vast annexe including the restoration workshops. Allow two hours to do the museum justice.

The museum is slightly out of the way (about 400m west of the train station), so if you don't fancy the walk, you can ride the **road train** (adult/child £2/1) that runs every 30 minutes from noon to 5pm between the minster and the museum.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Museum Gardens** (🕒 dawn-dusk) make a peaceful 4-hectare city-centre oasis. Assorted picturesque ruins and buildings include the **Museum Gardens Lodge** (Victorian Gothic Revival), dating from 1874, and a 19th-century working **observatory**. The **Multangular Tower** was the western tower of the Roman garrison's defensive wall. The small Roman stones at the bottom have been built up with 13th-century additions.

The **Yorkshire Museum** (☎ 629745; adult/child £5.50/2.50, with York Castle Museum £9.50/5; 🕒 10am-5pm) is linked with the Castle Museum (left) and has some interesting Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking and medieval exhibits and good temporary exhibitions.

The ruins of **St Mary's Abbey** (founded 1089) date from 1270 to 1294. The ruined **Gatehall** was its main entrance, providing access from the abbey to the river. The adjacent **Hospitium** dates from the 14th century, although the timber-framed upper storey is a much-restored survivor from the 15th century; it was used as the abbey guesthouse. **St Mary's Lodge** was built around 1470 to provide VIP accommodation.

St Olave's Church (🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) dates from the 15th century, but there has been a church dedicated to Norway's patron saint here since at least 1050.

Adjacent to Museum Gardens on Exhibition Sq is the 19th-century **York City Art Gallery** (☎ 551861; Exhibition Sq; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), which includes works by Reynolds, Nash, Boudin and LS Lowry.

Back inside the walls, the wonky lines inside **Holy Trinity** (☎ 613451; Goodramgate; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat May-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Apr) almost induce seasickness. The church was started in the 13th century and added to over the next 200 years. Rare 17th- to 18th-century box pews surround a two-tier pulpit.

If 18th-century Georgian houses are for you, then a visit to **Fairfax House** (☎ 655543; www.fairfaxhouse.co.uk; Castlegate; adult/child £5/free; 🕒 11am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun, guided tours 11am & 2pm Fri) should be on your itinerary. This exquisitely restored property was designed by John Carr (of Harewood House fame; see p514) and features the best example of rococo stucco work to be found in the north of England.

North of here, the quaintly cobbled **Shambles** (www.yorkshambles.com), complete with overhanging Tudor buildings, hints at what a medieval street might have looked like if it was overrun with people trying to buy something silly and superfluous before being back on the tour bus in 15 minutes. It takes its name from the Saxon word *shamel*, meaning 'slaughterhouse'.

York Dungeon (☎ 632599; www.thedungeons.com; 12 Clifford St; adult/child £11.45/8.45; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Nov-Jan, 10.30am-4.30pm Oct, Feb & Mar) is a series of exultantly gruesome and overpriced historical reconstructions. For the especially hardened there's a lovely bit on the plague.

Tours

There's a bewildering array of tours on offer, from historic walking tours to a host of ever-competitive night-time ghost tours – pretty popular in what is reputed to be England's most haunted city. For starters, check the tourist office's own website for walking itineraries (www.visityork.org/explore).

BOAT

YorkBoat (☎ 628324; www.yorkboat.co.uk; Lendal Bridge; 1hr cruises adult/child £6.50/3.30, ghost cruises adult/child £7.50/4) runs one-hour Ouse cruises from Lendal Bridge at 10.30am, noon, 1.30pm and 3pm February to November. The obligatory ghost cruise runs nightly at 6.30pm in high season (April to October) from King's Staith.

BUS

York Citysightseeing (☎ 655585; www.city-sightseeing.com; day tickets adult/child £8.50/4; 🕒 9am-5pm Apr-Oct) runs two hop-on hop-off services calling at all the main sights; buses leave every 15 minutes from Exhibition Sq outside the tourist office.

WALKING

Association of Voluntary Guides (☎ 640780; www.york.touristguides.btinternet.co.uk; 🕒 tours 10.15am, also 2.15pm Apr-Sep & 6.45pm Jun-Aug) Free two-hour walking tours of the city from Exhibition Sq in front of York City Art Gallery.

Breadcrumbs Trail (☎ 610676; www.endpapers.co.uk; Collage Corner, 2 Norman Ct; book £9.95) Explore York by following the Hansel-and-Gretel-type trails laid out in the book – a novel and excellent way to keep the kids entertained. The book is available from bookshops and El Piano restaurant (see p535).

Complete York Tour (☎ 706643) A walk around the city and the minster that can be adapted to your preferences. Call for details.

Ghost Hunt of York (☎ 608700; www.ghosthunt.co.uk; adult/child £5/4; 🕒 tours 7.30pm) Award-winning and highly entertaining 75-minute tour beginning at the Shambles.

Original Ghost Walk of York (☎ 01759-373090; adult/child £4/2.50; 🕒 tours 8pm) Ghouls and ghosts courtesy of a well-established group departing from the King's Arms pub by Ouse Bridge.

Roam'in Tours of York (☎ 07931 668935; www.roamintours.co.uk) History and specialist tours (adult/child £4/2) or you can take its DIY audio tour (£4.50).

Yorkwalk (☎ 622303; www.yorkwalk.co.uk; adult/child £5/2) Offers a series of two-hour themed walks on an ever-growing list of themes, from the classics – Roman York, the snickelways (alleys) and City Walls – to specialised walks on chocolates and sweets; women in York; secret York; and the inevitable graveyard, coffin and plague tour. Walks depart from Museum Gardens Gate on Museum St.

Festivals & Events

For a week in mid-February, York is invaded by Vikings once again as part of the **Jorvik Viking Festival** (☎ 643211; www.vikingjorvik.com; Coppergate), which features battle re-enactments, themed walks, markets and other bits of Nordic fun.

Sleeping

Beds are tough to find midsummer, even at the spiked prices of the high season. The tourist office's efficient accommodation booking service charges £4, which might be the best four quid you spend in town.

There are plenty of decent B&Bs on the streets north and south of Bootham, the northwest continuation of High Petergate; Grosvenor Tce, a handsome street along the railway tracks, is particularly full of them. Southwest of the town centre, B&Bs are clustered around Scarcroft, Southlands and Bishopthorpe Rds.

BUDGET

York Backpackers (☎ 627720; www.yorkbackpackers.co.uk; 88-90 Micklegate; dm/d from £14/34; 💻) In a Grade I Georgian building that was once home to the High Sheriff of Yorkshire, this large, well-equipped hostel has all the usual facilities as well as internet access and a residents-only bar that serves cheap beer until 1am.

York Youth Hotel (☎ 625904; www.yorkyouthhotel.demon.co.uk; 11 Bishophill Senior; dm £14-18, s/d £30/50; 💻) Offering the cheapest single rooms within the city walls, this is a good option for travellers who are on a budget but still want to stay close to the action.

York YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6102/3; www.yha.org.uk; Water End, Clifton; dm £18.50) Once the Rowntree (Quaker confectioners) mansion, this handsome Victorian house in its own grounds is almost entirely self-contained – there's even a bar on the property. Most of the rooms are four-bed dorms. It's about a mile northwest of the tourist office; turn left into Bootham, which becomes Clifton (the A19), then left into Water End. There's a riverside footpath from Lendal Bridge, but it's ill lit so avoid it after dark. Alternatively, take bus 2 from Museum St.

MIDRANGE

Fairfax House (☎ 434784; www.york.ac.uk; 99 Heslington Rd; s/d £26.50/52; 🕑 Jun-Sep only) Part of the University of York, this ivy-clad building offers accommodation in standard, well-equipped rooms, but only outside of term. It is 2 miles southeast of the city. Take bus 4.

Dairy Guesthouse (☎ 639367; www.dairyguesthouse.co.uk; 3 Scarcroft Rd; s/d £35/60; Ⓟ) A wonderful Victorian home that has retained many of its original features, including pine doors, stained glass, and cast-iron fireplaces, but the real treat is the flower- and plant-filled courtyard, off of which are the cottage-style rooms. The name comes from the time when it served as a town dairy.

Brontë House (☎ 621066; www.bronte-guesthouse.com; 22 Grosvenor Tce; s/d from £36/64) Five wonderful en-suite rooms all decorated completely differently: particularly good is the double with a carved, 19th-century sleigh bed, William Morris wallpaper and assorted bits and bobs from another era.

Golden Fleece (☎ 625171; www.goldenfleeceyork.com; 16 Pavement; s/d from £40/80) Four distinctive rooms (including the Shambles Room, with views over York's most famous street) that are said to be haunted. We've yet to see a ghost, but we liked what we did see: nice furnishings, comfortable beds and great hospitality.

Other options:

Briar Lea Guest House (☎ 635061; www.briarlea.co.uk; 8 Longfield Tce; s/d from £26/52) Clean, simple rooms and a friendly welcome in a house just off Bootham.

Alcuin Lodge (☎ 632222; alcuinlodge@aol.com; 15 Sycamore Pl; d from £30) Pretty doubles in a cluttered Victorian house.

City Guesthouse (☎ 622483; www.cityguesthouse.co.uk; 68 Monkgate; s/d from £37/64; Ⓟ) Very tidy house with meticulously arranged furniture and bric-a-brac; vegetarians catered for.

St Denys Hotel (☎ 622207; www.stdenyshotel.co.uk; St Denys Rd; s/d from £45/65) Slightly worn but still comfortable rooms. Good location inside the city walls.

TOP END

Four High Petergate (☎ 658516; www.fourhighpetergate.co.uk; 4 High Petergate; s/d £65/100) This stunning 18th-century house next to Bootham Bar has been converted into a gorgeous boutique hotel. Indonesian teak furniture, crisp white linen, flat-screen TV and DVD player are standard in all 14 bedrooms, even if the standard single and doubles are substantially more compact than the superior rooms (£110 to £125). Highly recommended for its class and location. The bistro next door is also excellent.

Guy Fawkes (☎ 671001; www.theguyfawkeshotel.com; 25 High Petergate; r £90-120) Directly opposite the minster is this comfortable new hotel, the premises of which include a cottage that is reputed to be the birthplace of Guy Fawkes himself. We're not convinced, but the cottage is now the handsomest room in the building, complete with a four-poster bed and lots of red velvet.

Dean Court Hotel (☎ 625082; www.deancourt-york.co.uk; Duncombe Pl; s/d from £95/125) With a commanding position directly across from the minster (you'll get a church view from the superior rooms only), this fine hotel has large, comfortable rooms, although we'd have to put a question mark next to some of the chintzy, pseudo-Georgian décor.

Mount Royale (☎ 628856; www.mountroyale.co.uk; The Mount; r from £107; Ⓟ 🏊) A grand, William IV listed building converted into a superb luxury hotel, with solarium, beauty spa and outdoor heated tub and swimming pool. The rooms in the main house are gorgeous, but the best are the open-plan garden suites, reached via a corridor of tropical fruit trees and bougainvillea.

Middlethorpe Hall (☎ 641241; www.middlethorpe.com; Bishopthorpe Rd; s £115-150, d £150-475; Ⓟ 🏊) York's top spot is this breathtaking 17th-century country house set in 8 hectares of parkland that was once the home of diarist Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. The rooms are spread between the main house, the restored courtyard buildings and three cottage suites. Although we preferred the grandeur of the rooms in the main house, every room is beautifully decorated with original antiques and oil paintings carefully collected so as to best reflect the period. The magnificent grounds include a white and walled garden and a small lake; guests are invited to use the facilities of the attached spa. Bus 11 stops outside.

Eating

Eating well in York is not a problem – there are plenty of fine options throughout the centre; many of the city's pubs also do grub – they're listed in the Drinking section.

BUDGET

Café Concerto (☎ 610478; 21 High Petergate; cakes £2-3, starters £5-8, mains £12.50-13.95; 🕑 10am-10pm) 'Music for your mouth' is the theme of this lovely café facing the minster. The walls are papered with sheet music, but it's the delicious food that makes the most noise – the chicken and avocado sandwich is sensational.

Betty's (☎ 659142; St Helen's Sq; sandwiches about £4.50, cream tea £6.50; 🕑 9am-9pm) Afternoon tea, old-school style, in a Yorkshire institution. Hardly surprising that most of the people in the fast-moving queue are of the older generations. Still, it's a bit of class, especially after 6pm, when the pianist adds colour to the proceedings.

El Piano (☎ 610676; www.elpiano.co.uk; 15 Grape Lane; mains £6; 🕑 10am-1am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) A vegetarian haven, this colourful, Hispanic-style spot has a lovely café downstairs and three themed rooms upstairs: check out the Moroccan room, complete with floor cushions.

Siam House (☎ 624677; 63a Goodramgate; mains £7-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) Delicious, authentic Thai food in about as authentic an atmosphere as you could muster up 6000km from Bangkok. The early bird, three-course special (£10.95) is an absolute steal.

Fiesta Mexicana (☎ 610243; 14 Clifford St; burritos £9.95; 🕑 dinner) *Chimichangas* (crisp, deep-fried tortillas), *tostadas* (fried tortillas with toppings) and burritos served in a relentlessly happy atmosphere. Students and party groups on the rip add to the fiesta; it's not subtle or subdued, but when is Mexican food ever so?

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Melton's Too (☎ 629222; 25 Walmgate; mains £8-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A very comfortable, booth-lined restaurant that does modern Brit cuisine such as Yorkshire sirloin steak as well as a host of salads and sandwiches. It's the slightly scruffier younger brother to Melton's.

La Vecchia Scuola (☎ 644600; 62 Low Petergate; mains £8-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Housed in the former York College for Girls, the faux elegant dining room – complete with self-playing grand piano – is straight out of *Growing Up Gotti*, but there's nothing fake about the food: authentic Italian cuisine served in suitably snooty style by proper Italian waiters.

Little Betty's (☎ 622865; 46 Stonegate; afternoon tea £12.75; 🕑 10am-5.30pm) Betty's younger sister is more demure, less frequented, but just as good; you go upstairs and back in time to what feels like the interwar years – it's possible to spot a couple of Agatha Christie lookalikes. The afternoon tea would feed a small village.

Melton's (☎ 634341; 7 Scarcroft Rd; mains £14-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner only Mon, lunch only Sun) Foodies come from far and wide to dine in one of Yorkshire's best restaurants. It tends to specialise in fish dishes but doesn't go far wrong with practically everything else, from Yorkshire beef to the asparagus risotto with pinenuts and herbs. There's an excellent lunch and early dinner set menu (£17).

Blue Bicycle (☎ 673990; 34 Fossgate; mains £15-24; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Once upon a time, this building was a well-frequented brothel; these days it serves up a different kind of fare to an equally enthusiastic crowd. French food at its finest, served in a romantic, candlelit room, makes for a top-notch dining experience.

J Baker's (☎ 622688; 7 Fossgate; 2-/3-course meal £18.95/24.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Superstar chef Jeff Baker left Leeds' Pool Court and his Michelin star to pursue his own vision of Modern British cuisine here. The defiantly traditional menu offers classics such as ox tongue, egg 'n' chips and steaks – these days, it's all about being one of the lads, so long as Messrs Michelin are paying close attention.

Drinking

With only a couple of exceptions, the best drinking holes in town are older, traditional pubs. In recent years, the area around Ousegate and Micklegate has gone from moribund to mental, especially at weekends.

Ackhorne (☎ 671421; 9 St Martin's Lane) Tucked away from beery, sloppy Micklegate, this locals' inn is as comfortable as old slippers. Some of the old guys here look like they've morphed with the place. There's a pleasant beer garden at the back.

Black Swan (☎ 686911; Peasholme Green) A classic black-and-white Tudor building where you'll find decent beer, nice people and live jazz on Sunday. Nice.

Blue Bell (☎ 654904; 53 Fossgate) A tiny, tiny pub with décor dating from 1798 and a surprisingly contemporary crowd (read: lots of young people).

Capital (☎ 639971; 1a Lower Ousegate) Trendy Casa was bought out in 2006 and remodelled so that it's newest incarnation is even trendier: lots of glass, plenty of beautiful people and great views over the River Ouse.

King's Arms (☎ 659435; King's Staith) York's best-known pub is a creaky place with a fabulous riverside location – hence its enduring popularity. A perfect spot for a summer's evening. Lunch is served for around £6.

Ye Olde Starre (☎ 623063; 40 Stonegate) Licensed since 1644, this is a bit of a tourist trap, but an altogether excellent pub that is popular with locals. It was used as a morgue by the Roundheads, but the atmosphere's improved since then. It has decent ales and a heated outdoor patio overlooked by the minster.

Entertainment

There are a couple of good theatres in York, a fairly interesting cinema, but as far as clubs are concerned, forget it: historic York is best enjoyed without them.

York Theatre Royal (☎ 623568; St Leonard's Pl) Stages well-regarded productions of theatre, opera and dance.

York Barbican Centre (☎ 656688; Barbican Rd) Big-name concerts in a partly pyramidal, modern building.

City Screen (☎ 541144; www.picturehouses.co.uk; 13-17 Coney St) Mainstream and art-house films.

Grand Opera House (☎ 671818; Clifford St) Despite its name puts on a wide range of productions.

Shopping

Coney St and its adjoining streets are the hub of York shopping, but the real treat for visitors are the secondhand and antiquarian bookshops, mostly clustered in two main areas, Micklegate and Fossgate.

Worm Holes Bookshop (☎ 620011; www.worm-holes.co.uk; 20 Bootham) Our favourite of York's dusty bookshops, with a decent and far-reaching selection of old and new titles.

Ken Spellman Booksellers (☎ 624414; 70 Micklegate) This fine shop has been selling rare, antiquarian and secondhand books since 1910.

Fossgate Books (☎ 641389; 36 Fossgate) Cheap paperbacks and unusual books.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The very useful **York Travel Bus Info Centre** (☎ 551 400; 20 George Hudson St; 🕐 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) has complete schedule information and sells local and regional tickets. All local and regional buses stop along Rougier St, off Station Rd inside the city walls on the western side of Lendal Bridge.

National Express coaches also stop here as well as outside the train station. Tickets can be bought at the tourist offices. There are services to London (£24.50, 5¼ hours, four daily), Birmingham (£23, three hours, one daily) and Edinburgh (£30.50, 5½ hours, one daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You won't need a car around the city, but it comes in handy for exploring the surrounding area. Rental options include: **Europcar** (☎ 656161), by platform one in the train station, which also rents bicycles and stores luggage (£5); and **Hertz** (☎ 612586), near platform three.

TRAIN

York train station is a stunning masterpiece of Victorian engineering. It also has plenty of arrivals and departures: Birmingham (£35, 2½ hours); Edinburgh (£65, 2½ hours, hourly); Leeds (£8.80, 50 minutes, hourly); London's King's Cross (£85, two hours, hourly); Manchester (£16.80, 1½ hours, six daily); and Scarborough (£10.30, 45 minutes).

Trains also go via Peterborough (£44.50, 1¾ hours, every 30 minutes) for Cambridge and East Anglia.

Getting Around

York is easily walked on foot. You're never really more than 20 minutes from any of the major sights or areas.

BICYCLE

The Bus Info Centre has a useful free map showing York's bike routes. If you're energetic you could pedal out to Castle Howard (15 miles), Helmsley and Rievaulx Abbey (12 miles) and Thirsk (another 12 miles), and then catch a train back to York. There's also a section of the Trans-Pennine-Trail cycle path from Bishopthorpe in York to Selby (15 miles) along the old railway line. The tourist offices have maps.

Two hire places are: **Bob Trotter** (☎ 622868; 13 Lord Mayor's Walk; rental per day £10), outside Monk Bar; and **Europcar** (☎ 656161; rental per day from £12), by platform one in the train station.

BUS

The local bus service is provided by **First York** (☎ 622992), which sells a day pass (£2.20) valid on all of its local buses – although you'll hardly need it if you're sticking close to town. The Bus Info Centre (opposite) has service details.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

York gets as congested as most English cities in summer and parking in the centre can be expensive (up to £9 for a day); but most guesthouses and hotels have access to parking.

TAXI

Station Taxis (☎ 623332) has a kiosk outside the train station.

AROUND YORK

Castle Howard

Stately homes may be two a penny in England, but you'll have to try pretty damn hard to find one as breathtakingly stunning as **Castle Howard** (☎ 01653-648333; www.castlehoward.co.uk; adult/child house & grounds £9.50/6.50, grounds £7/6.50; 🕐 house 11am-4.30pm, grounds 10am-4.30pm mid-Mar–Oct), a work of supreme theatrical grandeur and audacity set in the rolling Howardian Hills with wandering peacocks on its terraces. This is one of the world's most beautiful buildings, and instantly recognisable for its starring role in *Brideshead Revisited* – which has done its popularity no end of good since the TV series first aired in the early 1980s.

When the earl of Carlisle hired his mate Sir John Vanbrugh in 1699 to design his new home, he was hiring a bloke who had no formal training and was best known as a playwright; luckily Vanbrugh hired Nicholas Hawksmoor, who had worked for Christopher Wren, as his clerk of works – not only would Hawksmoor have a big part to play in the house's design but the two would later do wonders with Blenheim Palace (p354).

If you can, try to visit on a weekday, when it's easier to find the space to appreciate this hedonistic marriage of art, architecture, landscaping and natural beauty. Wandering about the grounds, views open up over the hills, Vanbrugh's playful Temple of the Four Winds and Hawksmoor's stately mausoleum, but the great baroque house with its magnificent central cupola is an irresistible visual magnet. Inside, it is full of treasures, such as the chapel's Pre-Raphaelite stained glass.

Castle Howard is 15 miles northeast of York, 4 miles off the A64. It can be reached by several tours from York. Check with the tourist office for up-to-date schedules. Yorkshire Coastliner bus 840 (40 minutes from York, one daily) links Leeds, York, Castle Howard, Pickering and Whitby. The Coastliner Freedom ticket (adult £11) is good for unlimited rides all day; buy tickets on the bus.

THIRSK

☎ 01845 / pop 9099

Monday and Saturday are market days in handsome Thirsk, which has been trading on its tidy, attractive streets and cobbled square since the Middle Ages. Thirsk's brisk business was always helped by its key position on two medieval trading routes: the old drove road between Scotland and York, and the route linking the Yorkshire Dales with the coast. That's all in the past, though: today, the town is all about the legacy of James Herriot, the wry Yorkshire vet adored by millions of fans of *All Creatures Great and Small*.

Thirsk does a good job as the real-life Darrowby of the books and TV series, and it should, as the real-life Herriot was in fact local vet Alf Wight, whose house and surgery has been dipped in 1940s aspic and turned into the incredibly popular **World of James Herriot** (☎ 524234; www.worldofjamesherriot.org; 23 Kirkgate; adult/child £4.99/3.50; 🕐 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar), an excellent museum full of Wight artefacts, a video documentary of his life and a re-creation of the TV show sets. It's all quite well done and you'll be in the company of true fans, many of whom have that look of pilgrimage on their faces.

Almost directly across the street is the less-frequented **Thirsk Museum** (☎ 527707; www.thirskmuseum.org; 14-16 Kirkgate; admission £1.50; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat), which crams a collection of items from Neolithic times to the Herriot era into a tiny house where Thomas Lord (of Lord's Cricket Ground fame) was born in 1755.

Thirsk's **tourist office** (☎ 522755; thirsk@ytbtic.co.uk; 49 Market Pl; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter) is on the main square; it can book B&Bs and has an accommodation list.

The **Three Tuns Hotel** (☎ 523124; www.the-three-tuns-thirsk.co.uk; Market Pl; s/d from £50/70) is a fairly imposing 18th-century coaching inn best known as having hosted the Wordsworths on their honeymoon in 1802. The bedrooms have changed somewhat since then, and today offer comfortable if unspectacular accommodation. Restaurant mains start from £7.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent daily buses from York (45 minutes).

Thirsk is well served by trains on the line between York and Middlesbrough. However, the train station is a mile west of town and the only way to cover that distance is on foot or by **taxi** (☎ 522473).

AROUND THIRSK

Sheltered in the secluded valley of the River Skell are two of Yorkshire's most beautiful attractions and an absolute must on your northern itinerary. The strangely obsessive and beautiful formal **Studley Royal water gardens** were built in the 19th century so as to enhance the extensive ruins of the 12th-century **Fountains Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01765-608888; www.fountainsabbey.org.uk; abbey, hall & garden £6.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb). Together they create a breathtaking picture of pastoral elegance and tranquillity that have made them the most visited of all the National Trust's pay-in properties and Yorkshire's only World Heritage Site.

After falling out with the Benedictines of York in 1132, a band of rebel monks came here to what was then a desolate and unyielding patch of land to found their own monastery. Struggling to make it on their own, they were formally adopted by the Cistercians in 1135: by the middle of the 13th century the new abbey had become the most successful Cistercian venture in the country. It was during this time that most of today's ruins were built, including the church's nave and transepts, outlying buildings and the church's eastern end (the tower was added in the late 15th century).

After the dissolution the estate was sold into private hands and between 1598 and 1611 Fountains Hall was built with stone from the abbey ruins. The hall and ruins were united with the Studley Royal Estate in 1768.

The main house of Studley Royal burnt down in 1946 but the superb landscaping, with its serene artificial lakes, survives hardly changed from the 18th century. Studley Royal was owned by John Aislabie (once Chancellor of the Exchequer), who dedicated his life to creating the park after a financial scandal saw him expelled from parliament.

THE WHITE MONKS

Founded at Cîteaux in Burgundy in 1098, the Cistercians were hard-core. They rejected the free-lovin', toga-party antics of those wild and crazy Benedictines in favour of an even more austere form of living: they lived in the most inhospitable parts of the kingdom and refused to wear underwear. Their habits were made of undyed sheep's wool – hence their nickname – and they survived on a starvation diet. Nobody complained either, because they were committed to long periods of silence and eight daily services. But, with so much time given over to starving themselves in silent prayer, there was no room for work so they ordained lay brothers who tilled their lands, worked their lead mines and tended their flocks of sheep. And so it was that their commitment to a superdisciplined 1st-century Christianity made them powerful and rich – and encouraged other orders such as the Augustinians and their old nemesis the Benedictines to follow suit. The Scottish Wars and the Black Death threw an economic spanner in the works though, and they were eventually forced to lease their lands to tenant farmers and live off the proceeds. When Henry VIII went to war with the monasteries in 1536, he used their perceived greed and laziness as partial justification. Surely a case of king pot calling the white kettles black?

Fountains Abbey is 4 miles west of Ripon off the B6265. The **deer park** (admission free, car park £2) opens during daylight hours. **St Mary's Church** (🕒 1-5pm Apr-Sep) features occasional concerts. There are free one-hour guided tours (11am and 2.30pm April to October and 3.30pm April to September, garden 2pm April to October).

Public transport is limited to summer Sunday services; call for details of any buses that might be running.

HARROGATE

☎ 01423 / pop 85,128

The doyenne of the Victorian spa town, prim, pretty Harrogate has long been associated with a certain kind of old-fashioned Englishness, the kind that seems to be the preserve of retired army chaps and formidable dowagers who, inevitably, will always vote Conservative. They come to Harrogate to enjoy the formidable flower shows and gardens that fill the town with an almost unparalleled array of colour, especially in spring and autumn, when the floral displays are at their height. It is truly fitting that the town's most famous visitor was Agatha Christie, who fled here incognito in 1926 to escape her broken marriage.

Yet this picture of Victoriana redux is not quite complete. While it's undoubtedly true that Harrogate remains a firm favourite of visitors in their golden years, the New Britain makeover has left its mark in the host of smart new hotels and trendy eateries that dot the town, catering to the boom in Harrogate's newest trade, conferences. All those dynamic young guns have to eat and sleep somewhere...

Orientation & Information

Harrogate is almost surrounded by gardens including the 80-hectare Stray in the south. The mostly pedestrianised shopping streets, Oxford and Cambridge Sts, are lined with smart shops and the **post office** (11 Cambridge Rd; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat). The **tourist office** (☎ 537300; www.harrogate.gov.uk/tourism; Crescent Rd; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat Oct-Mar) is in the Royal Baths Assembly Rooms; staff can give information about free historical walking tours offered daily from Easter to October.

Sights & Activities

THE WATERS

Take the plunge into the waters and the past in the fabulously tiled **Turkish Baths** (☎ 556746; www.harrogate.co.uk/turkishbaths; Tue/Sat & Sun to 5pm/all other times £10/15/13; 🕒 9am-9pm) in the Royal Baths Assembly Rooms. The mock Moorish facility is gloriously Victorian and offers a range of watery delights – steam rooms, saunas, and so on. A visit should last at least two hours.

There's a complicated schedule of opening hours that are at turns single sex and mixed pairs – call or look online for more details. You can prebook a range of reasonably priced massages and other therapies.

Just around the corner is the ornate **Royal Pump Room Museum** (☎ 556188; Crown Pl; admission £2.80; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Nov-Mar), built in 1842 over the most famous of the sulphur springs. It gives an insight into how the phenomenon created the town and the illustrious visitors that it attracted, and there's a chance to tuck into some stinky spa water.

GARDENS

A huge green thumbs-up to Harrogate's gardeners; the town has some of the most beautiful public gardens you'll ever see. The quintessentially English **Valley Gardens** are overlooked by the vast, ornate, glass-domed **Sun Pavilion**, built in 1933. The nearby bandstand houses concerts on Sunday afternoons from June to August. Flower-fanatics should make for the **Harlow Carr Botanical Gardens** (☎ 565418; www.rhs.org.uk; Crag Lane, Beckwithshaw; adult/child £6/1.60; 🕒 9.30am-6pm, to dusk if earlier), the northern showpiece of the Royal Horticultural Society. The gardens are 1.5 miles southwest of town. To get here, take the B6162 Otley Rd or walk through the Pine Woods southwest of the Valley Gardens.

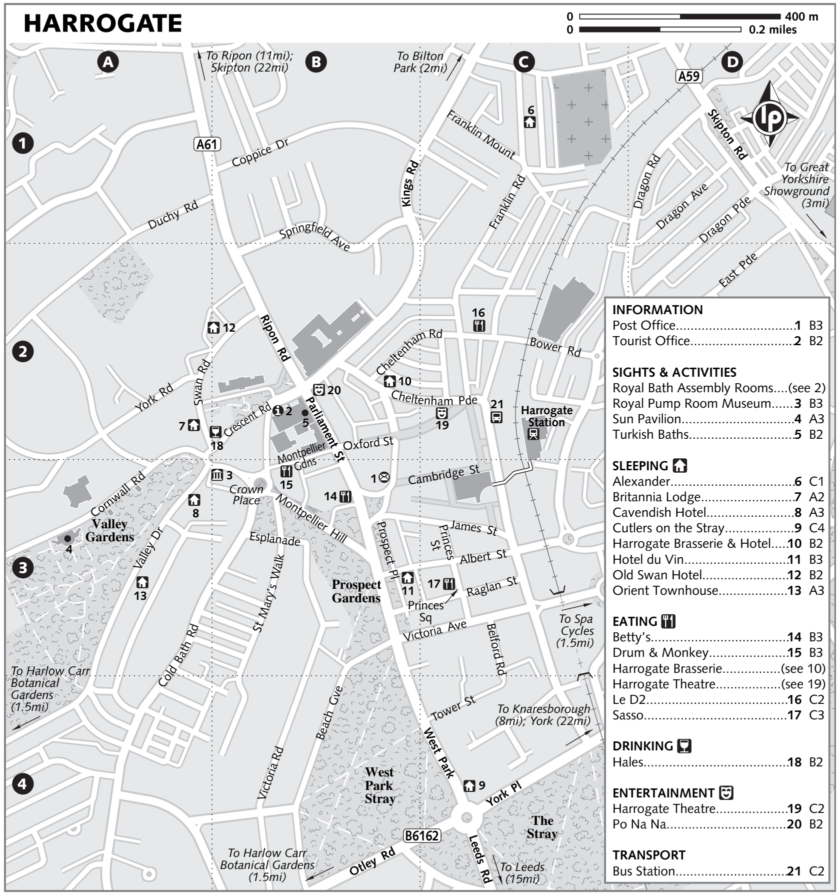
The **West Park Stray** is another fine garden and park, south of the centre.

Festivals & Events

The year's main event is the immense **Spring Flower Show** (☎ 0870 758 3333; www.flowershow.org.uk; admission £11-14), held in late April, followed in late September by the **Autumn Flower Show** (admission £11). Both take place at the Great Yorkshire Showground.

If fancy shrubs aren't your thing, there's a lot more fun to be had at the **Great Yorkshire Show** (☎ 541000; www.greatyorkshireshow.org; adult/child £18/8), a three-day exhibition staged in mid-July by the Yorkshire Agricultural Society (also held at the showground). It's a real treat, with all manner of farm critters competing for prizes and last year's losers served up in a variety of ways.

HARROGATE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Franklin Rd
Dragon Rd
Dragon Ave
Dragon Pde
Skipton Rd
East Pde
To Great Yorkshire Showground (3mi)
Ripon Rd
Swan Rd
York Rd
Crescent Rd
Parliament St
Cheltenham Rd
Cheltenham Pde
Bower Rd
Harrogate Station
Oxford St
Montpellier Gdns
Cambridge St
Crown Place
Montpellier Hill
Cornwall Rd
Valley Gardens
Valley Dr
Esplanade
Prospect Pl
Princes St
James St
Albert St
Raglan St
Prospect Gardens
Princes Sq
Victoria Ave
St Mary's Walk
Cold Bath Rd
To Spa Cycles (1.5mi)
Belford Rd
To Harlow Carr Botanical Gardens (1.5mi)
Beach Gve
Tower St
To Knaresborough (8mi); York (22mi)
Victoria Rd
West Park Stray
West Park
York Pl
The Stray
B6162
Otley Rd
Leeds Rd
To Leeds (15mi)
To Harlow Carr Botanical Gardens (1.5mi)

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Britannia Lodge	**7**	A2
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Hotel du Vin	**11**	B3
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Betty's	**14**	B3
Drum & Monkey	**15**	B3
Harrogate Brasserie	(see 10)	
Harrogate Theatre	(see 19)	
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Sasso	**17**	C3
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TRANSPORT		
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Sleeping

BUDGET

Bilton Park (☎ 863121; biltonpark@tcsmail.net; Village Farm, Bilton; tent sites £11; 🕐 Apr-Oct) A convenient camp site 2 miles north of town. Take bus 201, 203 or 204 from the bus station.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Britannia Lodge (☎ 508482; www.britlodge.co.uk; 16 Swan Rd; s/d £55/85; Ⓟ) The Britannia is a beautiful home on a leafy street, and has three immaculate doubles and a fabulous, self-contained two-bedroom suite (with a real fireplace) on the lovely garden. Nice little touches like a welcome coffee – from a cafetiere, no less – make this place a very good choice.

Old Swan Hotel (☎ 500055; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk; Swan Rd; s/d from £69/90; Ⓟ ♿) An ivy-coated 18th-century country hotel set in 2 hectares of gardens – right in the middle of town. It was here that Agatha Christie holed up in 1926; the interiors have been spruced up and are now as handsome as they were when Agatha put her head on the pillows.

Cutlers on the Stray (☎ 524471; www.cutlers-web.co.uk; 19 West Park; d from £85; Ⓟ ♿) A touch of the Mediterranean comes to Yorkshire in the shape of this stylish boutique hotel and brasserie in a converted coaching inn. Yellows, creams and reds are used to great effect in the rooms, which are thoroughly modern in design.

Orient Townhouse (☎ 565818; www.orienttownhouse.com; 51 Valley Drive; s/d from £105/130) The Eastern flavours of this handsome town house don't extend much further than the duvet covers and the odd bit of decoration, but this fine guesthouse is an excellent choice if you're looking for a bit of pampering.

Hotel Du Vin (☎ 856800; www.hotelduvin.com; Prospect Pl; r/ste from £105/150; Ⓟ 💻) A very stylish boutique hotel to make the other lodgings in town sit up and take notice. Inside the converted town house, standard rooms are spacious and extremely comfortable; each has a trademark huge bed draped in soft Egyptian cotton. The loft suites – with their exposed oak beams, hardwood floors and designer bathrooms – are the nicest rooms we've seen in town. Breakfast (£9.95 to £13.50) is not included. The Sunday-to-Thursday rate is about £20 cheaper than the weekend rate.

Other options:

Alexander (☎ 503348; thealexander@amserve.net; 88 Franklin Rd; s/d £30/60; Ⓟ) Handsome Victorian mansion with immaculate, unstintingly floral rooms.

Cavendish Hotel (☎ 509637; 3 Valley Dr; s/d from £38/57, 4-poster £75) Comfortable rooms with a touch of flounce, the best of which overlook the Valley Gardens.

Harrogate Brasserie & Hotel (☎ 505041; www.brasserie.co.uk; 28-30 Cheltenham Pde; s/d from £52.50/85) Has 14 stylish rooms, an excellent restaurant and frequent live jazz.

Eating

BUDGET

Harrogate Theatre (Oxford St; sandwiches about £5; 🕐 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) A grand old café that's popular at lunchtime.

Betty's (☎ 502746; www.bettysandtaylors.co.uk; 1 Parliament St; mains around £7.50; 🕐 9am-9pm) A classic tearoom dating from 1919, founded by a Swiss immigrant confectioner who got on a wrong train, ended up in Yorkshire and decided to stay. It heaves with scone groupies (tea and scones about £5). A pianist tinkles among the teacups from 6pm.

Le D2 (☎ 502700; 7 Bower Rd; mains £6-9; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Mediterranean colours and red-and-white tablecloths are often a substitute for proper food, but they're merely the backdrop for a genuinely good menu at this smart brasserie. The fresh bread rolls and salads are terrific.

MIDRANGE

Sasso (☎ 508838; 8-10 Princes Sq; lunch menu £8, mains £8-15; 🕐 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon) A top-class basement trattoria where homemade pasta is served in a variety of traditional and authentic ways, along with a host of Italian specialities.

Drum & Monkey (☎ 502650; 5 Montpellier Gardens; mains £8-12; 🕐 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Our favourite restaurant in town serves up mouthwatering seafood dishes to an enthusiastic and loyal clientele.

Harrogate Brasserie (☎ 505041; 30 Cheltenham Pde; 2-course meal £15.95; 🕐 dinner) There's more than a hint of New Orleans at this friendly, popular brasserie serving up some pretty good French cuisine. Photos of jazz greats adorn the red walls to complement the regular live performances.

Drinking

Hales (☎ 725571; 1-3 Crescent Rd) Have a decent pint of ale or some filling pub grub by flickering gaslight at this traditional pub.

Entertainment

Po Na Na (☎ 509758; 2 Kings Rd; free before 11pm; 🕐 10pm-2am Wed-Sat) Harrogate's only half-decent late bar-club, with a none-too-outlandish soundtrack of funky stuff, from cheesy '70s disco to contemporary house.

Harrogate Theatre (☎ 502116; www.harrogatetheatre.com; Oxford St) Drama, comedy and music staged in Art Deco surroundings.

Getting There & Away

Trains serve Harrogate from Leeds (50 minutes, about half-hourly) and York (45 minutes, 10 to 12 daily).

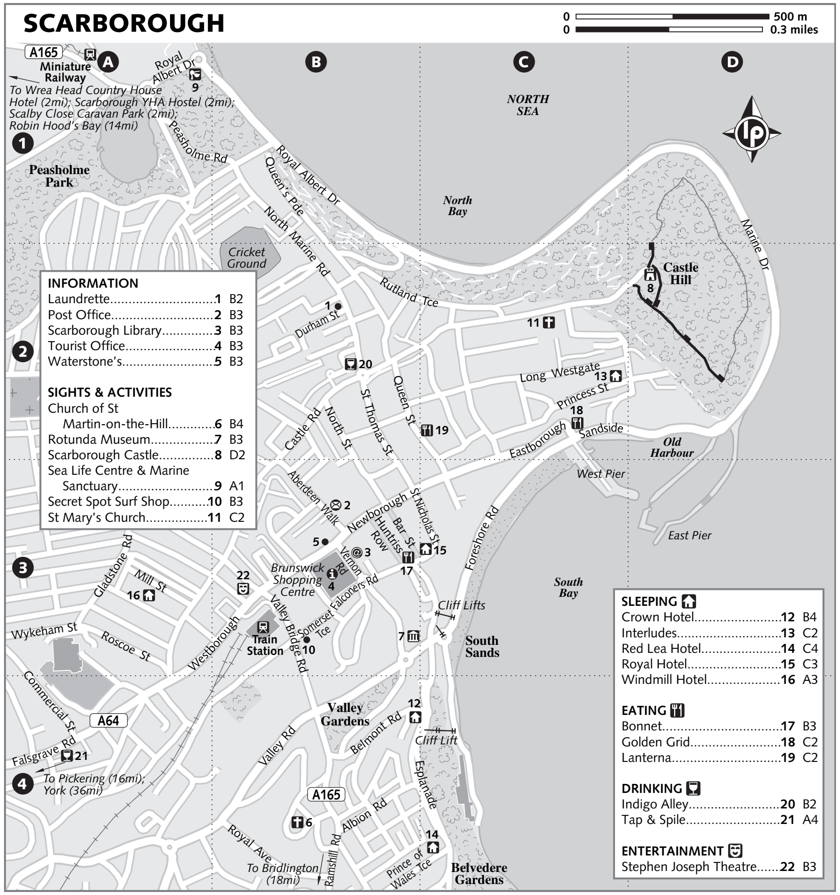
National Express bus 561 runs from Leeds (50 minutes, six daily). Bus 383 comes from Ripon (25 minutes, four daily). Buses 36 and 36A also run regularly between Ripon, Harrogate and Leeds.

SCARBOROUGH

☎ 01723 / pop 57,649

At first glance, Yorkshire's favourite seaside resort stands up quite well. It has a pretty spectacular setting above two beautiful white-sand bays; it is graced by a host of handsome buildings built at various times during the reigns of Edward, Victoria and the four Georges; and is topped by the romantic hulk of a castle. It sounds very inviting, but once you're on the waterfront the seaside kitsch overwhelms what is left of Scarborough's more genteel side: neon-lit amusement arcades and casinos draw punters away from the donkey rides and tacky souvenir stands.

It has been popular since the mid-18th century, and it is the vestiges of that era that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Peasholme Park
Peasholme Rd
Royal Albert Dr
Queen's Pde
North Marine Rd
Cricket Ground
NORTH SEA
North Bay
Rutland Tce
Castle Hill
8
Marine Dr
Durham St
11
20
Long Westgate
13
Princess St
18
Sandside
Eastborough
19
Old Harbour
West Pier
East Pier
Castle Rd
North St
St Thomas St
Queen St
Aberdeen Walk
2
Newborough
St Nicholas St
Foreshore Rd
5
3
Vernon Rd
Huntriss Row
Bar St
15
17
Brunswick Shopping Centre
4
Falconers Rd
Gladstone Rd
Mill St
16
22
Cliff Lifts
South Bay
Wykeham St
Roscoe St
Westborough
Train Station
Valley Bridge Rd
Somerset Tce
10
7
South Sands
A64
Commercial St
Valley Gardens
Belmont Rd
12
Cliff Lift
Falsgrave Rd
21
To Pickering (16mi); York (36mi)
Valley Rd
A165
Albion Rd
Esplanade
6
Royal Ave
To Bridlington (18mi)
Ramshill Rd
Prince of Wales Tce
14
Belvedere Gardens
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are most interesting about Scarborough today. Its renowned theatre is the base of England's popular playwright, Alan Ayckbourn, whose plays always premier here.

Orientation

Modern suburbs sprawl west of the town centre, which is above the old town and the South Bay. The town is on a plateau above the beaches; cliff lifts, steep streets and footpaths provide the links. The Victorian development to the south is separated from the town centre by a steep valley, which has been landscaped and is crossed by high bridges.

The main shopping street, Westborough, has a dramatic view of the castle rising in the distance. The North Bay is home to all the tawdry seashore amusements; the South Bay is more genteel. The old town lies between St Mary's Church, the castle and the Old Harbour.

Information

Laundrette (☎ 375763; 48 North Marine Rd)

Post office (11-15 Aberdeen Walk; 🕙 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Scarborough Library (☎ 383400; Vernon Rd; 🕙 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat; per 30min £1) For internet use.

Tourist office (☎ 383637; www.discoveryorkshirecoast.com; Brunswick Shopping Centre, Unit 15a, Westborough; 🕙 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar)

Waterstone's (☎ 500414; 97-98 Westborough) For books and magazines.

Sights & Activities

Scarborough is not exclusively about bingo, buckets and burgers – there are a number of sights to distract you from the beach and its goings-on.

Battered **Scarborough Castle** (EH; ☎ 372451; admission £3.50; 🕙 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar) has excellent views across the bays and the town. There's been some kind of fortification here for nearly 2500 years, but the current structure dates from the 12th century. Legend has it that Richard III loved the views so much his ghost just keeps coming back. More corporeal beings can get to it via a 13th-century barbican.

Below the castle is **St Mary's Church** (☎ 500541; Castle Rd; 🕙 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sun May-Sep), dating from 1180 and rebuilt in the 15th and 17th centuries, with some interesting 14th-century chapels. Anne Brontë is buried in the churchyard.

Of all the family-oriented attractions on the bays, the best of the lot is the **Sea Life Centre & Marine Sanctuary** (☎ 376125; www.sealife.co.uk; Scalby Mills; adult/child £10.95/8.95; 🕙 10am-6pm) overlooking North Bay. Here you can explore the Jurassic seas, coral reefs and the newest addition, Turtle Reef, all about the shelled creatures. The rescue work done with woebegone seals is quite uplifting.

The Pre-Raphaelite, high Victorian interior of the **Church of St Martin-on-the-Hill** (☎ 360437; Albion Rd; 🕙 7.30am-5.30pm) was worked on by Burne-Jones, Morris, Maddox Brown and Rossetti.

The **Rotunda Museum** (☎ 374839; Vernon Rd) traces local matters from prehistory to the present, but is currently closed for a major renovation.

There are some decent waves out in the North Sea. The friendly **Secret Spot Surf Shop** (☎ 500467; www.secretspot.co.uk; 4 Pavilion Tce) can advise on conditions, recommend places for lessons and rent all manner of gear. The best time for waves is September to May.

See p551 for more information about the 20-mile Whitby–Scarborough Coastal Cycle Trail.

Sleeping

If something stays still long enough in town, it'll offer B&B; competition is intense and it's difficult to choose between places. In such a tough market, multinight-stay special offers are two a penny, which means that single-night rates are the highest of all.

BUDGET

Scalby Close Caravan Park (☎ 366212; www.scalbyclosepark.co.uk; Burniston Rd; sites £12-15; 🕙 Easter-Oct) A small park about 2 miles north of town with plenty of sites for vans and tents as well as five fixed holiday caravans for rent (£140 to £325 per week). The park has all the usual facilities. Take bus 12 or 21.

Scarborough YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6022; www.yha.org.uk; Burniston Rd; dm £13.95; 🕙 Apr-Aug) This simply idyllic hostel in a converted water mill from around 1600 has comfortable four- and six-bed dorms as well as a lounge, self-catering kitchen and laundry. It is 2 miles north of town along the A166 to Whitby. Take bus 3, 12 or 21.

MIDRANGE

Interludes (☎ 360513; www.interludeshotel.co.uk; 32 Princess St; s/d from £29/51; 🅿) Owners Ian and Bob have a flair for the theatrical, and have brought it to bear with incredible success on this lovely, gay-friendly Georgian home plastered with old theatrical posters, prints and other thespian mementos. The individually decorated rooms are given to colourful flights of fancy that can't but put a smile on your face. Children, alas, are not welcome.

Windmill Hotel (☎ 372735; www.windmill-hotel.co.uk; Mill St; s/d from £30/60; 🅿) A beautifully converted 18th-century mill in the middle of town offers tight-fitting but comfortable doubles around a cobbled courtyard – the upstairs rooms have a small veranda.

Royal Hotel (☎ 364333; www.englishrosehotels.co.uk; St Nicholas St; s/d from £40/80) Scarborough's most famous hotel has a lavish Regency interior, grand staircase for Shirley Bassey–style entrances, and smart rooms, some with sea views. The perfectly comfortable but characterless rooms just don't compare with the grandeur of the public spaces.

Red Lea Hotel (☎ 362431; www.redleahotel.co.uk; Prince of Wales Tce; s/d £41/82; 🅿 🏊) An elegant terrace of six Georgian houses makes up this popular choice, which has large rooms rich in velvet drapes, lush carpets and king-size beds. Downstairs is a heated, kidney-shaped swimming pool and, next door, a small leisure centre with sauna, sunbeds and a gym.

TOP END

Crown Hotel (☎ 373491; www.scarboroughhotel.com; Esplanade; s/d from £60/110; 🅿 🏊) This grand old hotel opened its nearly regal doors in 1845 and has been going strong ever since, changing constantly with the times. It looks fancy and Victorian, but inside it's just another comfortable business-style hotel. Rooms with sea views cost £10 extra.

Wrea Head Country House Hotel (☎ 378211; www.englishrosehotels.co.uk; Barmoor Lane, Scalby; s/d £75/130) This fabulous country house about 2 miles north of the centre is straight out of *Remains of the Day*. The 20 individually styled bedrooms have canopied four-poster beds, plush fabrics and delicate furnishings, while the leather couches in the bookcased, wood-heavy lounges seem fit for important discussions over cigars and expensive brandy.

Eating

Bonnet (☎ 361033; 38-40 Huntriss Row; mains from £5; 🕑 café 9am-5.30pm, restaurant dinner Fri & Sat) An excellent tearoom, open since 1880, with delicious cakes, a serene courtyard, and adjoining shop selling handmade chocolates.

Golden Grid (☎ 360922; 4 Sandside; cod from £6; 🕑 lunch & dinner Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) Whoever said fish and chips can't be eaten with dignity and grace has never set foot in the Golden Grid, which has been doling them out since 1883. It's bright and traditional, with starched white tablecloths.

Lanterna (☎ 363616; 33 Queen St; mains £12-18; 🕑 dinner Mon-Sat) A snug Italian spot that specialises in fresh local seafood as well as favourites from the Old Boot; it's the place to go for that special night out in Scarborough.

Drinking

Indigo Alley (☎ 375823; North Marine Rd) A small, welcoming pub with a good range of beers. Regular live jazz and blues and Monday theatre in a limpet-sized curtained-off space.

Tap & Spile (☎ 363837; 94 Falsgrave Rd) This relaxed pub has a few rooms and a good selection of Yorkshire ales.

Entertainment

Stephen Joseph Theatre (☎ 370541; www.sjt.uk.com; Westborough; tickets about £13) Stages a good range of drama. Renowned chronicler of middle-class mores Alan Ayckbourn premieres his plays here.

Getting There & Away

Reasonably frequent Scarborough & District buses (number 128) go along the A170 from Pickering (one hour) and Helmsley (1½ hours). They leave from Westborough.

There are regular buses, 93 and 93A (via Robin Hood's Bay), from Whitby (one hour). Bus 843 arrives from Leeds (£14.20, eight to 12 daily) via York (£11).

There are regular trains from Hull (£11.25, one hour 20 minutes, hourly), Leeds (£18, one hour 20 minutes, six to eight daily) and York (£13, 45 minutes, hourly).

Getting Around

Victorian funicular lifts slope up and down Scarborough's steep cliffs to the beach daily from February till the end of October. Local buses leave from the western end of Westborough and outside the train station.

For a taxi call ☎ 361009; £4.50 should get you to most places in town.

NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK

Wild, windswept and oh so interesting, it's not difficult to imagine a jealous Heathcliff losing his mind with rage amid the rolling whale-back hills and deep green valleys of the North York Moors. Of course it isn't, for it was in this very landscape that Emily Brontë set her most famous novel, but there's plenty more to this area than Wuthering Heights. The ridge-top roads and high open moors afford terrific views of the dramatic countryside – where you will spot an isolated farm or village or come across the odd castle and ruined abbey – while to the east the moors suddenly give way to an even more dramatic coastline of sheer cliffs, sheltered bays and long sandy beaches.

If you visit anytime between July and early September you will be met by the explosive bloom of heather, all bright pinks and mauve. Outside the flowering season, the colours are broody browns and purples – in vivid contrast to the deep greens of the Dales – giving the park its characteristic moody appearance.

Orientation & Information

The park covers 553 sq miles, with hills and steep escarpments forming the northern and western boundaries, and the eastern limit marked by the North Sea coast. The southern border runs roughly parallel to the A170 Thirsk–Scarborough road. The main gateway towns are Helmsley and Pickering in the south, and Whitby in the northeast – all with good tourist offices. The national park also runs tourist offices (called visitor centres) at Sutton Bank, Danby and Robin Hood's Bay. Outside the park, Scarborough is another good gateway.

The national park produces the very useful *Moors & Coast* visitor guide (60p), available at tourist offices, hotels etc, with information on things to see and do and an accommodation listing. The park website at www.moors.uk.net is even more comprehensive.

Activities

Several ideas for short walks and rides (from a few hours to all day) are suggested in this section, and tourist offices stock an excellent range of walking leaflets (around 60p to 75p), as well as more comprehensive walking and cycling guidebooks.

CYCLING

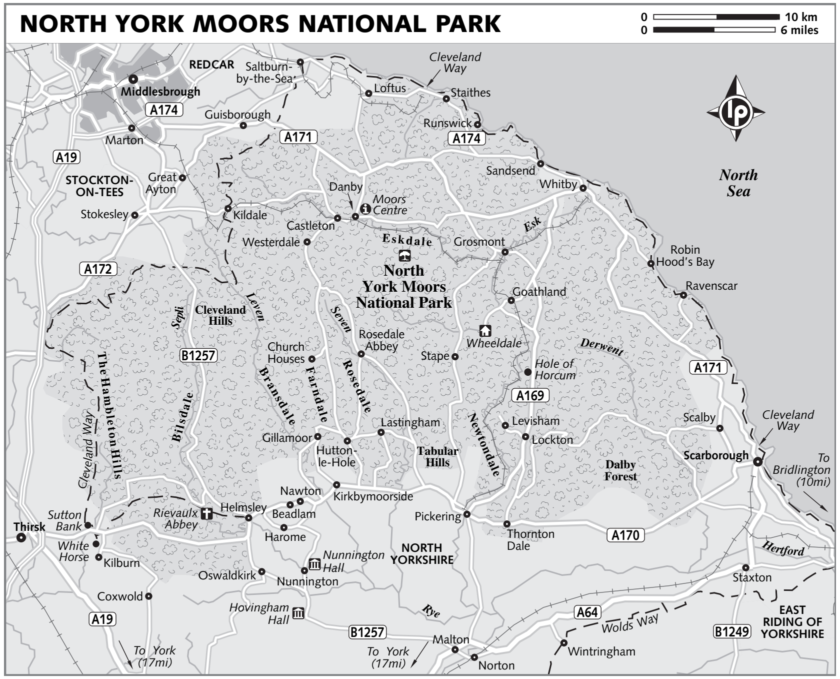
Once you've puffed up the escarpment, the North York Moors make fine cycling country, with ideal quiet lanes through the valleys and scenic roads over the hills. There's also a great selection of tracks and former railways for mountain bikes.

WALKING

There are over 1400 miles of walking paths and tracks crisscrossing the moors. The best walking opportunities are along the western escarpment and the clifftops on the coast. The green and tranquil valleys are also ideal for a spot of relaxed rambling, although, for avid walkers, the broad ridges and rolling high ground of the moors can be a bit featureless after a few hours and for that reason this area is not as popular as the Yorkshire Dales or the Lake District – a plus if you're looking for peace and quiet.

For long-distance walks, the famous Coast to Coast route (p501) strides across the park, and the **Cleveland Way** covers three sides of the moors' outer rim on its 109-mile, nine-day route from Helmsley to Filey, through a wonderful landscape of escarpments and coastline.

The **Cook Country Walk**, named for explorer Captain Cook, who was born and raised in this area, links several monuments commemorating his life. This 40-mile, three-day route follows the flanks of the Cleveland Hills from Marton (near Middlesbrough), then the superb coast from Staithes south to Whitby.


NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK
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REDCAR
Saltburn-by-the-Sea
Middlesbrough
A174
Guisborough
Marton
A19
A171
Loftus
Cleveland Way
Staithes
Runswick
A174
Sandsend
Whitby
North Sea
STOCKTON-ON-TEES
Great Ayton
Stokesley
Kildale
Danby
Moors Centre
Castleton
Westerdale
Eskdale
Esk
Grosmont
Robin Hood's Bay
Ravenscar
North York Moors National Park
A172
Goathland
Cleveland Hills
Sepli
Leven
Seven
Rosedale Abbey
Stape
Wheeldale
Derwent
Hole of Horcum
A171
B1257
Church Houses
The Hambleton Hills
Cleveland Way
Bilsdale
Bransdale
Farndale
Rosedale
A169
Lastingham
Newtondale
Levisham
Lockton
Scalby
Cleveland Way
Gillamoor
Hutton-le-Hole
Tabular Hills
Scarborough
To Bridlington (10mi)
Dalby Forest
Nawton
Kirkbymoorside
Helmsley
Beadlam
Rievaulx Abbey
Sutton Bank
Thirsk
Pickering
Harome
Thornton Dale
A170
White Horse
Kilburn
Nunnington Hall
NORTH YORKSHIRE
Oswaldkirk
Nunnington
Hertford
Staxton
Coxwold
Hovingham Hall
Rye
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A19
B1257
Wolds Way
EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE
B1249
To York (17mi)
To York (17mi)
Malton
Norton
Wintringham

Sleeping

The national park is ringed with towns and villages, all with a good range of accommodation – although options thin out in the central area. Walkers and outdoor fans can take advantage of the network of camping barns. Most are on farms, with bookings administered by the **YHA** (☎ 0870 870 8808). For more details tourist offices have a *Camping Barns in England* leaflet.

Getting There & Around

If you're coming from the south, from York (17 miles outside the park) there are regular buses to Helmsley, Pickering, Scarborough and Whitby.

From the north, head for Middlesbrough, then take the Esk Valley railway line through the northern moors to Whitby via Grosmont and several other villages which make useful bases. A second line, the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR), runs through the park from Pickering to Grosmont. Using these two railway lines, much of the moors area is easily accessible for those without wheels.

The highly useful **Moorsbus** (☎ 01845-597000) operates on Sunday from May to October, daily from mid-July to early September, and is ideal for reaching out-of-the-way spots. Pick up a timetable and route map from tourist offices. A standard Moorsbus day pass costs £3, and for £12.50 the pass covers you on the Esk Valley and NYMR trains too – a good deal if you plan to really make a day of it. Family tickets and one-off fares for short journeys are also available.

Call the national **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608) for all public bus and train information.

HELMSLEY

☎ 01439 / pop 1620

Beneath the watchful gaze of a sturdy Norman castle, Helmsley is a classic North Yorkshire market town, a handsome old place full of old houses, historic coaching inns and – inevitably – a cobbled square where Friday is market day. Nearby are the dreamlike ruins of Rievaulx Abbey and there is a fistful of decent walks in the area. All told, you could do far worse than base yourself here to explore this gorgeous southwest corner of the moors.

Orientation & Information

The centre of everything is Market Pl; all four sides are lined with twee shops, cosy pubs and several cafés. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 770173; www.ryedale.gov.uk; 🕘 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Fri-Sun Nov-Feb) sells maps, books and helps with accommodation.

Sights

The impressive ruins of 12th-century **Helmsley Castle** (EH; ☎ 770442; admission £4; 🕘 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar), just southwest of the Market Pl, have a striking series of deep ditches and banks (aka earthworks), to which later rulers added the thick stone walls and defensive towers – only one tooth-shaped tower survives today following the dismantling of the fortress by Sir Thomas Fairfax following the Civil War. The castle's tumultuous history is well explained in the newish visitor centre.

Just outside the castle, **Helmsley Walled Garden** would be just another plant and produce centre, were it not for its dramatic position and its fabulous selection of flowers, fruits and vegetables – some of which are quite rare – not to mention the herbs, including 40 varieties of mint. If you're into horticulture with a historical twist, this is Eden.

South of the castle stretches the superb landscape of **Duncombe Park** with the grand stately home of **Duncombe Park House** (☎ 770213; www.duncombepark.com; house & grounds £6.50, park only £3.50; 🕘 house by guided tour only, every 30min 12.30-3.30pm, gardens 11am-5.30pm Sun-Thu late Apr-Oct) at its heart. From the house and formal gardens, wide grassy walkways and terraces lead through woodland to mock-classical temples, while longer walking trails are set out in the parkland – now protected as a nature reserve. The house, ticket office and information centre are 1.5 miles south of town, an easy walk through the park. You could easily spend a day here.

Activities

Of the numerous walks in Duncombe Park, the 3.5-mile route to Rievaulx Abbey is the real star. The tourist office can provide route leaflets, and advise on buses if you don't want to walk both ways. This route is also the overture to the Cleveland Way (p545). Cycling to Rievaulx Abbey is also possible, but the roads are quite busy; a better option for cyclists is the network of quiet (and relatively flat) country lanes east of Helmsley.

Sleeping

Wrens of Rydale (☎ 771260; www.wrensofryedale.fsnet.co.uk; Gale Lane, Nawton; car & 2 adults/hikers £10/8.50) Three acres of pristine parkland divided into sections for tents and caravans. This excellent camp site is 3 miles east of Helmsley, just south of Beadlam.

Helmsley YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5860; www.yha.org.uk; Carlton Lane; dm £13.95) This purpose-built hostel just outside the centre is a bit like an ordinary suburban home; its location at the start of the Cleveland Way means that it's virtually always full so book in advance.

There are a number of old coaching inns on Market Pl that offer B&B, half-decent grub and a pint (or more) of hand-pumped real ale. The **Feathers Hotel** (☎ 770275; www.feathershotelhelmsley.co.uk; Market Pl; s/d from £44/80) has four-poster beds in some rooms and historical trimmings throughout, with mains for £8 to £11, while for something a lot plusher, head for the **Feversham Arms** (☎ 770766; www.fevershamarms.com; s/d £130/140; P 🏊), with mains for £16 to £23, which even has its own pool.

Eating & Drinking

Star Inn (☎ 770397; www.thestaratharome.co.uk; Harome; mains £10-17; 🕘 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This thatched-cottage pub is like hitting the rustic gastro-jackpot. In the middle is the kind of pub you could happily get slowly sloshed in, but the only thing to tear you away is the Michelin-starred feast that awaits you in the dining room. Each dish is a delicious rendering of some local favourite with a flight of fancy to make it really special: how about Nawton-bred middle white pig casserole with baked apples, black pudding and sage and Somerset brandy cream? You won't want to leave, and the good news is you don't have to: the adjacent lodge has eight magnificent bedrooms, each decorated in classic but luxurious country style (rooms £130 to £210). If we could, we'd live here. It's about 2 miles south of town just off the A170.

Royal Oak (Market Pl) The liveliest of the town's pubs, with good beer and bar meals.

Getting There & Away

All buses stop in the Market Pl. From York to Helmsley, take bus 31, 31A or 31X (three daily Monday to Saturday, 1½ hours). Between Helmsley and Scarborough, bus 128 (£6.40, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) goes via Pickering.

AROUND HELMSLEY

Rievaulx

The moors' most visited attraction is the famous remains of **Rievaulx Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01439-798228; admission £4.20; 🕘 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Thu-Mon Oct, to 4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar), about 3 miles west of Helmsley in the small eponymous village. Rievaulx (ree-voh) is everything a ruin should be: battered enough by the passage of time to give a venerable air, but with enough beautiful stonework, soaring pillars and graceful arches remaining so you can imagine how it looked in its 13th-century heyday.

The site is quite simply idyllic – a secluded, wooded valley overlooking fields and the River Rye – with a view pretty much as it was 900 years ago, when Cistercian monks first arrived. And it seems they enjoyed the scenery just as much as we do today: one abbot, St Aelred, famously described the abbey's surroundings as 'everywhere peace, everywhere serenity, and a marvellous freedom from the tumult of the world.' If only he'd known how enduring his words would be. Ponder his words over a picnic. Or a spot of contemplation. Or both.

Near the abbey, **Rievaulx Terrace & Temples** (NT; ☎ 01439-798340; admission £4; 🕘 10.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Nov) is a wooded escarpment once part of extensive Duncombe Park (opposite). In the 1750s landscape-gardening fashion favoured a natural or Gothic look, and many aristocrats had mock ruins built in their parks. The Duncombe family went one better, as their lands contained a medieval ruin – Rievaulx Abbey – and the half-mile-long grassy terrace was built, with classical-style temples at each end, so lords and ladies could stroll effortlessly in the 'wilderness' and admire the ruins in the valley below. Today, we can do the same, with views over Ryedale and the Hambleton Hills forming a perfect backdrop.

A visit to these two historic sites makes a great day out from Helmsley, but note that there's no direct access between the abbey and the terrace. Their entrance gates are about a mile apart and easily reached along a lane – steeply uphill if you're going from the abbey to the terrace.

Sutton Bank

Sutton Bank is a dramatically steep escarpment 8 miles west of Helmsley. If you're driving, this may be your entry to the North York Moors. And what an entry. The road climbs steeply up, with magnificent views westwards across to the Pennines and Yorkshire Dales. At the top, there's a **tourist office** (☎ 01845-597426; 🕘 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov, Dec &

Mar, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Jan & Feb) with exhibitions about the moors, books and maps for sale, and handy leaflets on short walks to nearby viewpoints. If you don't have your own wheels, the Moorsbus service M3 links Sutton Bank with Helmsley, from where all other parts of the park can be reached.

Coxwold

☎ 01347 / pop 190

Coxwold is an immaculate village of golden stone with a serene sense of symmetry, nestling in beautiful countryside about 7 miles southwest of Helmsley. It may be in the north but it shouts Middle England (it even *sounds* like Cotswold), and Yorkshire accents are pretty scarce hereabouts.

Apart from the quiet picture-postcard beauty of the place, the main attraction is the 15th-century **Shandy Hall** (☎ 868465; admission gardens/house £4.50/2.50; ⏲ house 2-4.30pm Wed, 2.30-4.30pm Sun May-Sep, gardens 11am-4.30pm May-Sep), home to ebullient eccentric Laurence Sterne (1713–68), author of *Tristram Shandy*. The house is full of 'Sterneana', with lots of information on this entertaining character who was seemingly the first to use the expression 'sick as a horse'.

Nearby is **Byland Abbey** (EH; ☎ 868614; admission £3; ⏲ 10am-5pm Jul, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun & Sep), the elegant remains of a fine Cistercian creation, now a series of lofty arches surrounded by open green slopes.

A decent option for a good night's sleep is the **Coxwold Schoolhouse B&B** (☎ 868077; www.coxwoldyorkshire.com; s/d £30/50). For a bite to eat, try the **Fauconberg Arms** (☎ 868214; Main St; mains £10-15), a cosy local in the heart of the village with a fine Continental-style menu in its elegant restaurant.

HUTTON-LE-HOLE

☎ 01751 / pop 210

A contender for best-looking village in Yorkshire, Hutton-le-Hole may sound odd but it's actually a wonderful collection of gorgeous stone cottages centred on a village green, an undulating grassy expanse with a stream creating a small valley that divides the village in two. The dips and hollows on the green might give the village its name – it was once called simply Hutton Hole, but posh wannabe Victorians added the Frenchified 'le', which the locals defiantly pronounce 'lee'. Its popularity as an understated tourist destination has twee-ified the place somewhat, but it's lovely for a stroll and a streamside picnic.

The **tourist office** (☎ 417367; ⏲ 10am-5.30pm mid-Mar–early Nov) has leaflets on walks in the area, including a 5-mile circuit to the nearby village of Lastingham.

Attached to the tourist office is the largely open-air **Ryedale Folk Museum** (☎ 417367; www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk; adult/child £4.50/3; ⏲ 10am-dusk Mar-Oct, to 5.30pm Nov-Feb), a constantly expanding collection of North York Moors buildings from different eras, including a medieval manor house, simple farmers' houses, a blacksmith's forge and a row of 1930s village shops. Demonstrations and displays throughout the season give a pretty fascinating insight into local life as it was in the past.

The **Daffodil Walk** is a 2.5-mile circular walk following the banks of the River Dove. As the name suggests, the main draws are the daffs, usually at their best in the last couple of weeks in April.

Sleeping & Eating

Hutton-le-Hole has a small choice of places to stay in the village itself, and the tourist office can help with more suggestions if you want to stay in a B&B on a farm in the surrounding countryside.

Burnley House (☎ 417548; www.burnleyhouse.co.uk; d from £65) This elegant Georgian home offers comfortable B&B, a hearty breakfast and a separate four-poster bedroom (off the main house) that sounds luxurious but is far too small for such a huge bed!

Crown (bar meals £7-11) The village pub, this is a straightforward spot that's popular with locals and visitors.

The main street also boasts a handful of teashops, all offering drinks, snacks and lunches.

Getting There & Away

Hutton-le-Hole is 2.5 miles north of the main A170 road, about equidistant from the market towns of Helmsley and Pickering. Moorsbus services (p546) through Hutton-le-Hole include the M3 between Helmsley and Danby (seven per day) and the M1 and M2 between Pickering and Danby (eight per day). Outside times when the Moorsbus runs, you'll need your own transport to get here. Alternatively catch bus 128 along the A170, get off at the junction east of Kirkbymoorside and walk the 2.5 miles up the lane to Hutton-le-Hole.

PICKERING

☎ 01751 / pop 6616

The lively market town of Pickering has its charms – most notably the Norman castle and the fabulous North Yorkshire Moors Railway, for which Pickering serves as a terminus – but it is too big and bustling to keep you in thrall. It is, however, a handy staging post from which to explore the eastern moors.

The **tourist office** (☎ 473791; www.ryedale.gov.uk; The Ropery; ⏲ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-4pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) has the usual details as well as all NYMR-related info.

Sights & Activities

Pickering Castle (EH; ☎ 474989; admission £3; ⏲ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Oct) is a lot like the castles we drew as kids: thick stone outer walls circling the keep, and the lot perched atop a high motte (mound) with great views of the surrounding countryside. Founded by William the Conqueror, it was added to and altered by later kings.

The privately owned **North Yorkshire Moors Railway** (NYMR; ☎ Pickering Station 472508, recorded timetable 473535; www.northyorkshiremoorsrailway.com, www.nymr.demon.co.uk) runs for 18 miles through beautiful countryside to the village of Grosmont. Lovingly restored steam locos pull period carriages, resplendent in polished brass and bright paintwork, and the railway appeals to train buffs and day-trippers alike. For visitors without wheels, it's excellent for reaching out-of-the-way spots. Even more useful, Grosmont is also on the main railway line between Middlesbrough and Whitby, which opens up yet more possibilities for walking or sightseeing.

Sleeping & Eating

White Swan Hotel (☎ 472288; www.white-swan.co.uk; Market Pl; s/d from £89/129) The top spot in town successfully combines a smart pub, a superb restaurant serving local dishes with a Continental twist (mains £9 to £15) and a luxurious little boutique hotel all in one. Nine new rooms in the converted coach house up the ante with LCD flat-screen TVs and other stylish paraphernalia to add to the luxury found elsewhere.

There's a strip of similar B&Bs on tree-lined Eastgate (which becomes the A170 to/from Scarborough). Decent options include **Eden House** (☎ 472289; www.edenhousebandb.co.uk; 120 Eastgate; s/d from £26/52), a pretty house with cottage-style décor, and flower- and plant-clad **Rose Folly** (☎ 475067; www.rosefolly.freeserve.co.uk; 112 Eastgate; s/d £28/52), with lovely rooms and a beautiful breakfast conservatory.

Drinking

There are several cafés and teashops on Market Pl, and for drinks of another sort the **Bay Horse** (Market Pl) is a good no-nonsense pub.

Getting There & Away

Bus 128 between Helmsley (40 minutes) and Scarborough (50 minutes) runs hourly via Pickering. Yorkshire Coastliner services (840, 842 and X40) run to/from York (£9.10, hourly, 70 minutes).

For train details, see left.

DANBY

☎ 01287 / pop 290

Danby is an isolated stone village deep in the moors at the head of Eskdale, where the surrounding countryside is particularly beautiful. It makes a good base, as the **Moors Centre** (☎ 01439-772737; www.moors.uk.net; ⏲ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov, Dec & Mar, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Jan & Feb), the park headquarters, is just half a mile from the village, and has displays, information, a café, an accommodation-booking service and a huge range of local guidebooks, maps and leaflets as well as all the information you'll need on walking routes.

There are several short circular walks from the centre, but first on your list should be **Danby Beacon**; it's a stiff 2 miles uphill to the northeast, but the stunning 360-degree views across the moors sweeten the sweat.

The **Duke of Wellington** (☎ 660351; www.danby-dukeofwellington.co.uk; s/d from £34/65), a fine traditional pub – used as a recruitment centre during the Napoleonic Wars – serves good beer and meals (mains about £7); upstairs there are nine well-appointed rooms.

Using the delightful **Esk Valley Railway** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.eskvalleyrailway.co.uk), access is easy: Whitby is 20 minutes east; Middlesbrough is 45 minutes west. There are four departures Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday.

WHITBY

☎ 01947 / pop 13,594

When it comes to a bit of classy charm, Whitby blows all of northern England's coastal resorts out of the water. The narrow medieval streets are lined with restaurants, pubs and cute little shops, and everything more or less leads down to the handsome harbour, where colourful fishing boats move in and out throughout the day. Keeping a watchful eye over the whole scene is the ruined and utterly atmospheric abbey atop one of the cliffs that hems the town.

Whitby wouldn't be a coastal resort without the requisite amusements and pleasure arcades, but here they are merely a part of the overall aesthetic rather than the defining feature. In spite of them, Whitby manages to retain much of its 18th-century character, harking back to the time when the town's most famous (adopted) son, James Cook, was making his first forays to sea on his way towards becoming one of the best-known explorers in history.

Besides the caravan of ordinary sun worshippers and beachcombers that flood the town throughout the summer months, Whitby is popular with good-time girls and boys, retirees, hikers, bikers and even Goths – who flock here for two festivals honouring the king of the vampires: Bram Stoker set part of *Dracula* here (see the boxed text, opposite).

And finally there's the all-important matter of fish and chips, and in Whitby you'll find the best in the *whole* country.

Orientation

Whitby is divided in two by the harbour and River Esk estuary. On the east bank (East Cliff) is the older part of town; the newer (19th-century) town grew up on the other side, West Cliff. An intriguing feature of Whitby is that many streets have two names. For example, Abbey Tce and Hudson St are opposite sides of the same street, as are West St and The Esplanade.

Information

Java Café-Bar (☎ 820832; 2 Flowergate; per 20min £1) Internet access.

Laundrette (72 Church St)

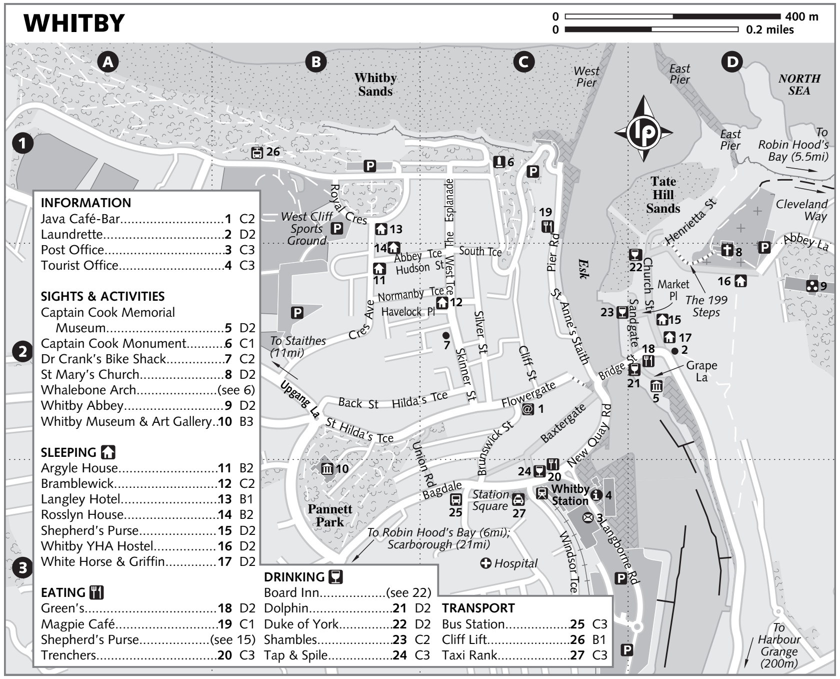
Post office (🕓 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Across from the tourist office inside the Co-op supermarket.

Tourist office (☎ 602674; www.discoveryorkshirecoast.com, www.visitwhitby.com; Langborne Rd; 🕓 9.30am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Apr) A wealth of information on the town and the surrounding moors and coast.

Sights

There are ruins, and then there's **Whitby Abbey** (EH; ☎ 603568; admission £4.20; 🕓 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Oct-Mar). Dominating the town, in a stunning location, this ancient holy place dates from the 11th to 14th centuries, with huge solid pillars, soaring arches and gaping windows made all the more dramatic with the North Sea sky behind. Nearby, **St Mary's Church** (🕓 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) has an atmospheric interior full of skewed and tilting galleries and box pews. You reach the abbey and the church via the famous 199 steps up the cliff side. Take time out to catch your breath and admire the view.

WHITBY



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WHITBY'S DARK SIDE

The famous story of *Dracula*, inspiration for a thousand lurid movies, was written by Bram Stoker while staying at a B&B in Whitby in 1897. Although most Hollywood versions of the tale concentrate on deepest, darkest Transylvania, much of the original book was set in Whitby, and many sites can still be seen today.

The tourist office sells an excellent *Dracula Trail* leaflet (80p), but you shouldn't miss the stone jetty in the harbour, where the Russian boat chartered by Dracula was wrecked as it flew in ahead of the huge storm.

After the town sites, you can climb the same 199 stone steps that the heroine Mina ran up when trying to save her friend Lucy. At the top of the steps is moody St Mary's Church, where Mina first saw Lucy sitting next to a suspicious black being. By that time, of course, it was too late. Cue music. The End.

Cook-related links are a big deal in Whitby, but the best place to find out about the famous seafarer is at the **Captain Cook Memorial Museum** (☎ 601900; www.cookmuseumwhitby.co.uk; Grape Lane; adult/child £3.50/2.50; 🕓 9.45am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Mar), a house once occupied by the ship-owner to whom Cook was apprenticed. Highlights include Cook's own maps and writings, etchings from the South Seas and a wonderful model of the *Endeavour*, with all the crew and stores laid out for inspection.

At the top of the cliff near East Tce, the **Captain Cook Monument** shows the great man looking out to sea, usually with a seagull perched on his head. Nearby the **Whalebone Arch** (it's just that), remembers Whitby's days as a whaling port.

South of here, in a park overlooking the town, is the wonderfully eclectic **Whitby Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 602908; Pannett Park; museum adult/child £3/1, art gallery admission free; 🕓 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-1pm Tue, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Apr), with fossils, Cook memorabilia, ships in bottles and weird stuff like an amputated hand and an invention for weather forecasting using live leeches. The gallery contains work by the Staithes group of artists.

Activities

Although it's hardly tranquil, a walk up the main road to the new bridge high above the Esk is worth it for great views. For something a bit longer, the 5.5-mile clifftop walk south to Robin Hood's Bay is a real treat (allow three hours). Or head north for 11 miles to reach Staithes (five hours). A bus from Middlesborough will get you home again (see p553).

First choice for a bike ride is the excellent 20-mile Whitby to Scarborough **Coastal Cycle Trail**, which starts a few miles outside town, following the route of an old railway line. It's particularly good for reaching Robin Hood's Bay. Bikes can be hired from **Dr Crank's Bike Shack** (☎ 606661; 20 Skinner St).

Festivals & Events

There's a full programme of festivals throughout the year; during these the town is particularly lively. Tops include the following:

Whitby Gothic Weekends (www.wgw.topmum.co.uk; tickets from £35) Goth heaven during the last weekends of April and October; anyone in town not wearing black or false fangs is a weirdo.

Moor & Coast Festival (www.moorandcoast.co.uk; tickets £35) A traditional folk festival of music, dance and dubious Celtic art over the May Bank Holiday.

Musicport Festival (www.musicport.fsnet.co.uk; tickets £82.50) A weekend-long world-music festival in mid-October.

Sleeping

Most of the B&Bs are concentrated on West Cliff around Hudson St; if a place isn't offering B&B, chances are it's derelict. Accommodation can be tough to find at festival times; it's wise to book ahead.

BUDGET

Whitby YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6089; www.yha.org.uk; Church Lane; dm £11.95; 🕓 Apr-Aug, Mon-Sat Sep-Oct, Fri & Sat Nov & Jan-Mar) With an unbeatable position next to the abbey on East Cliff overlooking

CAPTAIN COOK – WHITBY'S FAMOUS (ADOPTED) SON

Although he wasn't actually born in Whitby, the town has adopted the famous explorer Captain James Cook, and since the first tourists got off the train in Victorian times, local entrepreneurs have mercilessly cashed in on his memory, as endless 'Endeavour Cafés' and 'Captain Cook Chip Shops' testify.

Still, Whitby played a key role in Cook's eventual success as a world-famous explorer, in that the design of the ships used for his voyages of discovery – including the famous *Endeavour* – were based on that of Whitby 'cats', unique flat-bottomed ships carrying coal from Newcastle to London that the young Cook served his apprenticeship on from 1746 to 1755, when he eventually joined the Navy.

the town, this hostel doesn't have to try too hard, and it doesn't. You'll have to book well in advance to get your body into one of the basic bunks.

Harbour Grange (☎ 600817; www.whitbybackpackers.co.uk; Spital Bridge; dm £12) Overlooking the harbour, this tidy hostel is conveniently located but has the inconvenience of an 11.30pm curfew – good thing we're all teetotalling do-gooders, right?

MIDRANGE

Shepherd's Purse (☎ 820228; fax 820287; 95 Church St; s/d from £25/40) This place began life as a beads-and-baubles boutique in 1973, added a wholefood shop and vegetarian restaurant and now offers guesthouse accommodation. The plainer rooms that share a bathroom are perfectly adequate, but we recommend the en-suite bedrooms situated around a lovely courtyard; each has a handsome brass or four-poster bed and nice pine furniture.

White Horse & Griffin (☎ 604857; www.whitehorseandgriffin.co.uk; 87 Church St; s/d from £35/60) Walk through the suitably olde-worlde frontage of this handsome 18th-century coaching inn and discover a boutique hotel with individually designed, superstylish rooms that have managed to mix the best of tradition (antique panelling, restored period furniture, real flame fires) with the kind of sleek, contemporary lines and modern comforts you'd expect from a top-class guesthouse.

Langley Hotel (☎ 604250; www.langleyhotel.com; 16 Royal Cres; s/d £35/66; 🅿) The whiff of Victorian splendour may have faded, but the panoramic views from West Cliff are as good as ever. The rooms are tidy and neat, if a little cramped.

Other options:

Rosslyn House (☎ 604086; rosslyn_gh@btconnect.com; 11 Abbey Tce; s/d £24/48)

Argyle House (☎ 602733; www.argyle-house.co.uk; 18 Hudson St; s/d £25/48)

Bramblewick (☎ 604 504; www.bramblewick.co.uk; 3 Havelock Pl; s/d from £25/50; 🅿)

Eating & Drinking

For many visitors, Whitby cuisine extends no further than a fish-and-chip supper (served with peas, bread and tea), obtainable most everywhere for between £4 and £5 but preferably at the world's most famous chipper. If you want to keep your cholesterol in check, there are a few other options.

Shepherd's Purse (☎ 820228; 95 Church St; mains about £7) A veggie place behind a wholefood shop with the same name, with a great range of healthy, interesting snacks and meals, and a very nice courtyard.

Magpie Café (☎ 602058; 14 Pier Rd; mains £7-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner) The world's best fish and chips, or so the reputation would have it. They are bloody delicious, but the one downer is that the world and his wife knows about this place, and summertime queues can be off-putting.

Trenchers (☎ 603212; New Quay Rd; mains £7-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Excellent fish and chips minus the reputation, Trenchers is your best bet if you want to avoid the queues. Don't be put off by the modern look.

Greens (☎ 600284; www.greensofwhitby.com; 13 Bridge St; mains £14-22; 🕒 lunch & dinner Fri-Sun, dinner Mon-Thu) The fanciest restaurant in town does wonderful things with fish, caught fresh and delivered from the harbour: the filets of turbot are sensational. There are meat dishes on the menu, but the menu's real strength is seafood.

Many pubs also serve food, including, of course, fish and chips or crab sandwiches, all for about £5 to £7. A good first choice is the popular **Duke of York** (Church St) at the bottom of the 199 steps, with plentiful food and a classic Whitby atmosphere, while next door the smaller **Board Inn** (Church St) is another place with views, good beer and seafood. The **Dolphin** (Bridge St) has tables inside or out on the pavement, while the **Shambles** (Market Pl) is modern and spacious with huge picture windows overlooking the harbour. The **Tap & Spile** (☎ 603937; New Quay Rd) is a straightforward place with good local rock and folk bands.

Getting There & Away

Whitby is 230 miles from London and 45 miles from York.

Buses 93 and 93A run to/from Scarborough (one hour, hourly), and to Middlesbrough (about hourly), with fewer services on Sunday. Yorkshire Coastliner (buses 840 and X40) runs between Whitby and Leeds (£9.20, three hours, seven per day) via Pickering and York.

If you're coming from the north, you can get to Whitby by train along the Esk Valley line from Middlesbrough (£10.70, 1½ hours, four per day). From the south, it's easier to get a train from York to Scarborough, then a bus from Scarborough to Whitby.

Getting Around

Whitby is a compact place and those 199 steps help burn off the fish and chips. But if you need one, there's a taxi rank near the tourist office. West Cliff is also accessible via a lift (75p), which perishes the thought of clambering up the steep roads.

AROUND WHITBY

Robin Hood's Bay

Just 6 miles south of Whitby, Robin Hood's Bay has a lot more to do with smugglers than the Sherwood Forest hero, but this picturesque haven is well worth a visit, although like so many places it's very busy on summer weekends.

A single main street called New Rd winds through the old part of town, dropping steeply down from the clifftop to the sea. (There's compulsory parking at the top – don't even think about driving down as there's hardly room to turn at the bottom.) Off New Rd there's a honeycomb of cobbled alleys, secret passages and impossibly small houses. There are gift shops, teashops and a trail of pubs (it might be safer to start from the bottom and work your way up), many with seats outside, so this is an excellent place to just sit and watch the world go by.

Among the pubs, our favourite for ambience is the old **Dolphin** (☎ 01947-880337; King St); the **Victoria Hotel** (☎ 01947-880205; Station Rd) has the best beer and good food; and the **Bay Hotel** (☎ 01947-880278; The Dock) is notable for being the end of the famous Coast to Coast Walk (p501). Some pubs do B&B and there are several other accommodation options – the tourist office in Whitby can advise.

It's eminently possible to walk or cycle here from Whitby. Also, buses 93 and 93A run hourly between Whitby and Scarborough via Robin Hood's Bay – the bus stop is at the top of the hill, in the new part of town.

Staithes

Tucked beneath high cliffs and running back along the steep banks of a river, the small fishing town of Staithes seems to hide from the modern world, focusing still on its centuries-old battle with the sea. It's a lot less touristy than Robin Hood's Bay: the houses are less prettified, you can see fishermen's jackets drying on lines, and seagulls the size of vultures swoop down the narrow alleys that lead off the main street.

The town's claim to fame is that explorer James Cook worked as a grocer here when a boy. Legend says that fishermen's tales of the high seas, and bad treatment by his master, led him to steal a shilling and run away to Whitby. The rest of the tale is told in great detail in the fascinating and lovingly maintained **Captain Cook & Staithes Heritage Centre** (admission £3; 🕒 10am-5.30pm), packed to the gunwales with nautical relics.

Staithes is 11 miles from Whitby. To get here, the buses on the Whitby-to-Middlesbrough run can drop you at the top of the hill. If you're feeling fit, walking one way and busing the other makes for a great day out.

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